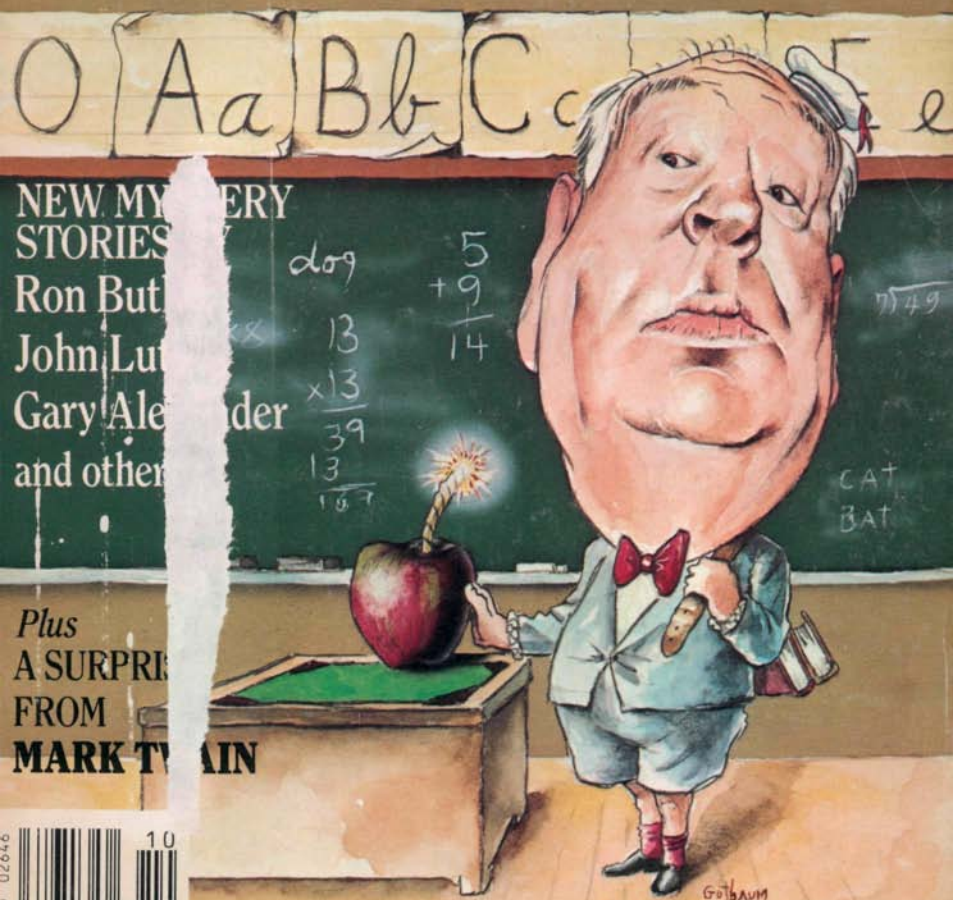


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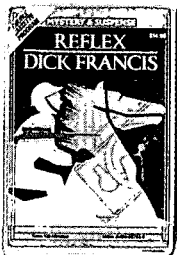
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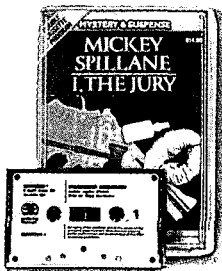


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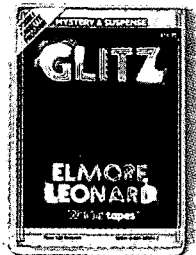
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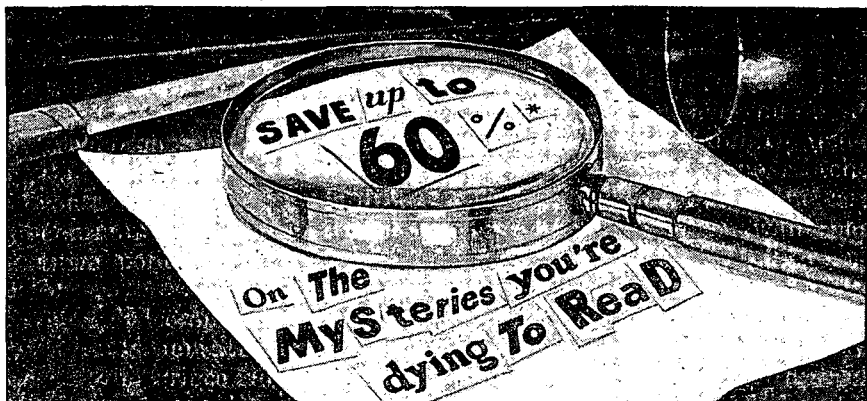
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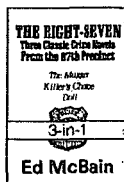
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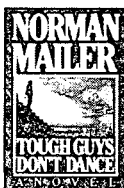
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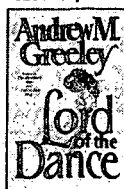
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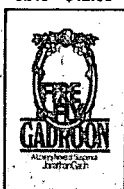
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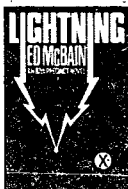
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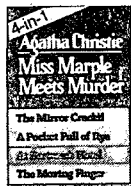
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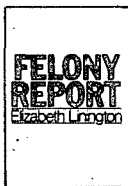
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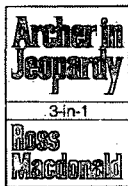
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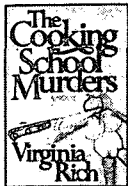
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GUEST EDITORIAL

by Lois Adams

After our June issue, in which we published Frank Stockton's famous story "The Lady or the Tiger?" and its not-so-famous sequel "The Discourager of Hesitancy," we got several letters from readers asking to know

once and for all *which door* the young man opened.

To our great relief, in the mail we also got at least one answer to the question, from Nancy E. Berk. It sounded plausible to us, and so, with her permission, we offer it to you.

THE LADY OR THE TIGER?

Is there a way to tell just how she'll choose?
Barbaric instincts are a flame that's cold and cruel.
Yet, either way, apparently, she'll lose
Her chosen lover. Hate and passion duel
Within her turmoiled breast. Now, could she dare
To do the drastic thing that she had planned?
She raised a finger, pointed to a door,
And lo!—Behind it with an outstretched hand
The lady stood. And while onlookers cheered,
The princess, with a dagger, stabbed the king—
And rising, said, "Now *I'm* the one most feared.
I, in my power do decree this thing;
Take the lady for the tiger's feast,
And I will take this man—for now, at least!"

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FICTION

The Dragon Lady

by Gary Alexander



Illustration by Steve Karras

Nations are created by accident and by force. The Kingdom of Luong was not. Luong does not exist. It is as fictional as the following events and characters, but for the purposes of this story, we can presume that Luong—

is a constitutional monarchy sometimes referred to as the fourth Indochinese protectorate.

is roughly the size and shape of Louisiana, though the toe of the boot points up, northward, nudging China. The sole borders Laos and Thailand. The heel and upper are surrounded by Burma.

is an isolated and landlocked nation of one and a half million people. The nearest seaport to Hickorn, the Luongan capital, is Rangoon, two hundred miles to the southwest.

is mountainous in the northern highlands, lush and tropical in the southern river valleys.

is a nominal exporter of gemstones and hardwood timber. Opium gum grown and harvested in the highlands is the only cash crop of substance.

is self-sufficient in agriculture. The ability to feed itself and the general political apathy of the population has allowed the Kingdom of Luong to avoid the strife suffered by Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Neighboring Marxist insur-

gents had their own problems, and even the most hawkish Pentagon analysts were unable to find anything of importance for the Luongan domino to fall against.

is ruled by seventy-four-year-old Prince Novisad Pakse, a consummate neutralist whose abiding passion is pocket billiards.

has, as its Hickorn Superintendent of Police a man named Bamsan Kiet, a man who intensely dislikes being awakened in the middle of the night.

“Sir, there has been a murder.” Superintendent Bamsan Kiet blinked and slapped Captain Binh’s flashlight away from his face.

“A murder?” he muttered.

“Yes, sir. Will you come with me to the scene?”

Binh brims with enthusiasm, Kiet thought. He has just returned from America, where he studied at one of their police academies. He has been dying to test what he has learned on a bona fide homicide.

“Binh,” he said, closing his eyes. “Of course there has been a murder. Only three people have been killed in Hickorn this year, and it is October. We were overdue for another. Do your work and report to

me in the morning."

"Superintendent, the victim is a foreigner."

Kiet groaned, sat up, and put on his trousers. He was a heavy man, wide and tall, a rarity amongst his small, lithe countrymen.

In his younger days, he had been described as Buddha-like, often by admiring ladies, but the bulk he now carried was a burden, no longer an advantage to an aging widower.

"What kind of foreigner?"

"An American, sir."

Kiet groaned again. When a Luongan died violently, it was usually a case of love flaring into hatred, a crime easily solved. But with foreigners, especially Americans and Russians, the motive was likely to be politics or business. Which always meant complexities and headaches.

"What happened? Who was the victim?"

"A small villa on Rue Ché Guevara," Binh said. "Neighbors heard a gunshot and investigated."

"Splendid. You have answered *where*."

"Oh, we are not yet sure exactly what happened. The dead man is a liquor salesman named David Walt."

"Better you show me," Kiet said, rising unsteadily to his feet. "If you must."

David Walt's house was modest compared to International District villas occupied by the wealthiest foreigners, but by Luongan standards it was quite substantial, two stories of stucco, abutted at the rear by homes on the next street. His neighbors were mostly Luongan merchants and bureaucrats of better than average means.

When Kiet and Binh arrived, uniformed police officers were posted outside. The front door was open, and every light in the house shone.

"My forensic teams are scouring the scene," Captain Binh said proudly.

Kiet said nothing. *Forensic!* Binh's studies abroad had left him as full of their terminology as their technology. He hoped the young captain's men hadn't made too big of a mess of things.

The large front room looked to Kiet like a cocktail bar. One entire wall was devoted to sinks and refrigerators. Bottle after bottle of liquor rested on shelving. Two officers were brushing fingerprint powder, seemingly at random. More white powder was on their hands than on the objects. Kiet stopped himself from reminding Binh that Luong had no fingerprint registry; if the killer was also an American, perhaps the effort would be worthwhile.

"As I said, sir, Walt sold liquor. To restaurants and hotels. He also sold them the equipment you see. He entertained clients frequently, using this as a showroom."

"I see no evidence of theft," Kiet said.

"There is none, sir, anywhere in the house."

Kiet was afraid of that. It was too much to hope that a simple burglary had gotten out of hand. Politics or business, he thought.

"Where is he?"

"Upstairs," Binh said grimly, leading Kiet to the stairs.

Walt's bedroom was decorated in rich brocades and hot red hues. Kiet had never seen such a large bed. A mirror was mounted on the ceiling above it. In a corner was an expensive stereo system. An air conditioner was impaled in the front window, humming.

On the floor was a male Caucasian in silk pajamas. He was in a kneeling position, wrists tied behind him. Kiet could tell little more about him; suffice it to say that he had been shot in the back of the head at close range.

Kiet averted his eyes and attempted to concentrate on other matters. If he became ill in the presence of his eager captain, the loss of face would be irreparable. He concentrated on a policeman who was digging fu-

riously in the wall with a knife.

Binh noticed and said, "The bullet exited from the victim and entered at that spot. If it isn't too badly mutilated, we may be able to match it to the weapon."

Kiet nodded, too queasy to start any trouble. A ballistics machine given to the Hickory police department by the Americans was stored unused for lack of need and lack of qualified technicians, tropical humidity insidiously attacking its innards. The device shared a room with a polygraph and a chemical spectrograph provided by the Soviets, who were not about to be upstaged.

He went down the stairs, Binh faithfully trailing.

"Who reported hearing the gunshot?"

"We do not know," Binh said. "It was an anonymous telephone message."

They walked outside and Kiet inhaled gulps of fresh air. When his stomach settled, he said, "Binh, Walt's home has no rear door, does it? No way in or out except the door we just passed through?"

"Correct."

Kiet gestured to the opposite side of the street. "Look. Houses and apartment buildings two and three and four floors tall. Families live there. I would estimate that no fewer than one

hundred people are within viewing range of where we now stand."

"Oh, I sent an officer to check, even before I came for you. It is late. Everyone claims to have been asleep. They saw nothing, sir."

"An officer? *One* officer?"

"I could spare nobody else from my forensic team," Binh said nervously. "Witnesses will be there tomorrow, but physical evidence must be immediately ascertained or—"

Kiet interrupted him with a groan. "Where is this one man you ordered to interview neighbors?"

"I sent him to the United States Embassy. Is it not correct that we are to immediately notify the appropriate foreign embassy in such a situation?"

"It is," Kiet conceded wearily. The lad was tired also, his last words defiant. Any more hectoring, Kiet knew, might trigger an insubordinate outburst both men would regret.

"I instructed him to report afterward to General Tho's office, sir."

Brigadier General Tho, Hickorn District military commander, was Kiet's immediate superior. This procedure, unfortunately, was also proper.

"What else do we know about this David Walt?"

"Very little at this point, su-

perintendent. It is obvious from his bedroom appointments that he was a ladies' man. I suggest we learn as much as possible regarding his female friends."

"I agree," Kiet said, scanning the covered windows across the street. Some curtains were angled at the edges, eyes peeking from the blackness beyond. Ten, fifteen, maybe twenty pairs of them. How many had heard the gunshot and seen the killer flee? Or was it killers? One man to hold the gun, others to tie Walt's hands?

Binh drove Kiet home, the men riding in silence. No more face would be lost tonight with harsh words. There will be parallel investigations, Kiet decided. Binh would pursue his rifling grooves and his thumbprint smudges, justifying his technological schooling. Kiet, on the other hand, would thrash through the case with the knowledge that, in Hickorn, *clue* and *gossip* were synonymous.

Kiet was ill at ease with diplomats, he realized again as he was ushered into Ambassador Smithson's office, perspiration adhering clothing to skin. He had been more relaxed with Ritchie, though, Smithson's predecessor. Ritchie had gone home when the previous Amer-

ican president had left office. All Ritchie cared about was the opium trade and human rights. After Kiet convinced him that he was powerless to stop the opium and that there were no political prisoners in his jail, they got along famously.

Ambassador Smithson was much harder to deal with. His only apparent interest in Luong was communism. Luong Rouge guerrillas were sporadically active in the highlands, as they had been for years, occasionally ambushing an army truck, essentially making nuisances of themselves. But Smithson insisted that guerrilla activity was "escalating," soon to sweep into the cities and destroy democracy.

Kiet doubted if there were any communist sappers in Hickorn. Even if there were, he doubted if he would recognize one if he found him sitting in his kitchen, wearing bandoliers and reading *Quotations from Chairman Mao*.

Kiet shook the hand of a humorless, inflexible man, a man who seemed rather like the Soviets he despised.

"Superintendent, good of you to come so promptly. Are there any developments yet?"

"No, Mr. Ambassador. In fact, I was hoping that you could provide information regarding Mr. Walt."

"Yes, well, while it's true that there are fewer than one hundred Americans in Luong, Walt was not associated with our government. We don't have a personnel jacket on him, therefore, but we do know a few things.

"According to our records, he came to Hickorn from Singapore seven months ago. He was a self-employed independent sales representative who seems to have prospered. I questioned my people about him, and some knew him vaguely. Their impression was that he drank quite a lot and was something of a ladies' man. He was discreet, however, and I recall no complaints filed against him here."

"He is not on our arrest records either, sir," Kiet said.

"This could become an awkward situation," Smithson said, frowning. "He was murdered execution-style, you know."

"Yes, sir, I know," Kiet said, his stomach fluttering at the memory.

"Well, superintendent, you know what this could mean, don't you?"

Oh no, Kiet thought; not this again. "Yes, sir."

"The Luong Rouge," Ambassador Smithson said, nodding gravely. "I have attempted to warn Prince Pakse of their escalation, their avowed intent to

bring a so-called war of national liberation to your tranquil kingdom, but the prince always deflects the conversation to billiards— Well, never mind. I'm speaking out of turn. Anyway, we're requesting a full-scale background check on David Walt. It is altogether possible that he *was* with our government, if you know what I mean. Could be his cover was blown and he was assassinated."

A CIA man who hunted communists by wearing silk pajamas and affixing a mirror above his spacious bed? Bamsan Kiet was skeptical. "Possibly," he said to be agreeable.

"I was posted in Saigon in the 1960's," Smithson said, winking. "I know how these situations develop."

"Yes, sir."

"I assume General Tho is deeply involved in the investigation. This is just his meat."

"I assume he will be," Kiet said. "If he so desires. He is my immediate superior."

"A damn good man," Ambassador Smithson said, winking again. "The Luong Rouge will rue the day they locked horns with him. If you'll pardon my vulgarity, superintendent, Tho is raising holy hell with the guerrillas and is putting a sizable dent in the drug trade besides."

Kiet smiled politely and closed his eyes. Smithson, of course, was referring to Tho's frequent trips north. Since the American ambassador had taken such a liking to the general, Prince Pakse had permitted Tho to "assist in coordinating counter-insurgency operations." This policy delighted Tho, who could more closely oversee his opium interests. On Smithson's wall was a photograph of the virulently anticommunist Tho standing beside a Rouge body, beaming like a sportsman who had bagged a record kill. Kiet wished he were home in bed.

"I'm having luncheon with Ambassador Kalashnikov today, superintendent. I'll mention the Walt murder in passing and read his reaction. Naturally he wasn't directly involved. They never are, but they always have knowledge of what's going on. It should be fascinating. Would you like a report of my impressions?"

Kiet saw this as an opportunity to escape. He told Smithson that he would be delighted and that he would eagerly await his findings. When he returned to police headquarters on Avenue John F. Kennedy, he saw a Jeep parked out front. Attached to its bumper was a red placard centered by a silver star. Brigadier General Tho.

Kiet groaned and walked in-

side. Captain Binh ran out of his office to meet him. He was carrying a small plastic bag and wearing a wide smile. "Sir, General Tho is wait—"

"I know, I know."

"Superintendent, look at this."

"A bullet," Kiet said, glancing at the contents of the bag.

"A .45 caliber automatic pistol slug, sir. The rifling grooves are in good condition. When we find the weapon, we should be able to easily make a match."

"Fine work," Kiet said, aware that the Americans had supplied .45 caliber pistols to the Luongan army after the Soviets had given AK-47 assault rifles. Thousands and thousands of .45 caliber pistols. Not to mention those owned by civilians. "Fine. Splendid, captain," he added, walking past him to his own office.

General Tho was a wiry man who wore aviator sunglasses indoors and out. His fatigues were so heavily starched that they reminded Kiet of cardboard. He was in Kiet's chair, feet on his desk, but Kiet did not complain. Tho was a cruel man, the most feared individual in Luong. Besides having many troops under his command, he was Prince Pakse's second cousin.

"Kiet, is there any progress on this dead American, this David Walt?"

"Nothing definitive yet, sir. Hopefully soon. The case is of utmost priority."

"I have my own sources of information," Tho said. "My people have been sniffing around, and they believe Walt was a major figure in opium smuggling. He was a big buyer who came to our country to control it from this end, in order to raise his profits."

Why this charade, Kiet wondered? Tho's involvement in the drug business was an unspoken truth. Along with senior army cronies in the highlands, he was a major cog, providing protection to the farmers who grew the poppy and the bandits who trafficked its essence. Customs officials under the general's thumb shut their eyes as opium gum was flown out of Hickorn International Airport. If Walt was a meddling American kingpin, he would have been killed before he could unpack his luggage.

Kiet would dearly love to jail the little worm of a general, but an arrest would pit his tiny police force against Tho's Hickorn District Division. Kiet's death would be the result, the guilt of a possible coup d'etat hanging over his grave. "Any assistance you can provide will be appreciated, sir."

"Look at it from that direc-

tion, superintendent," Tho said, getting up. "That's all I wanted to tell you. Walt's liquor selling was probably just a ruse. Americans do not come all the way to Hickorn and live so well on a handful of dollars earned from peddling whisky."

Kiet said yes sir, he would. When the general left, Kiet paused at Binh's doorway. The petulant expression on the young captain's face told him to move along. Perhaps later he could apologize for taking Binh's ballistics revelation so lightly, but now he would enjoy an early lunch, the rumblings in his stomach reminding him that eighteen hours had passed since his last meal.

It was a two-block stroll to the intersection of Kennedy and Rue Ho Chi Minh, to the Hickorn Continental. The hotel had been built in the 1920's and was still owned by absentee Frenchmen. Its first floor was an open-air restaurant that offered the best fried shrimp in Luong.

On his third plate of the exquisite freshwater shellfish, Kiet began to relax, began to sort out the Walt case with a degree of unrushed contemplation. Ambassador Smithson had insisted upon a political motive. Brigadier General Tho blamed the killing on business. The advice of a fool and a pathological liar repudiated his

original theories. Happily sipping his fourth Golden Tiger beer—a smooth local brew called “amber death” by westerners—Kiet began concentrating on more conventional reasons for the taking of a life.

He saw LaCroix, the Hickorn Continental manager, and waved him over. LaCroix had been a clerk in the French governor general's office, had married a Luongan woman and stayed on after Independence. Kiet distrusted any American or European who went *engagé*, questioning why they did not yearn for their homelands. What, after all, was so awful about the country of one's birth? If he were forced to leave Luong for more than a month, he knew he would be a melancholy wreck.

While LaCroix had never broken an obvious law, he was rumored to have knowledge of virtually everything that happened in Hickorn. Affluent visitors stayed at the Continental and affluent residents, Luongans and foreigners alike, ate and drank there. LaCroix's ear was sensitive, his capacity for gossip encyclopedic.

"I am honored, superintendent," LaCroix said, displaying yellowed teeth.

"I honor you and your fried shrimp twice a week, LaCroix. Let us discuss David Walt."

"A terrible thing," LaCroix

said, clucking his tongue.

"Did you buy from him?"

"I did. He had a line of bourbons and scotches less expensive than the competition's. He had a new line of bar equipment and supplies at equally good prices. Yes. As I understand, he sold to most establishments in Hickorn that cater to the elite."

"Was he also your customer?"

"I had the pleasure on occasion. Yes."

"Regularly?"

"One might say so."

"His social life, please. Go into detail if you wish. I have the time."

"Mr. Walt was an ardent consumer of his own wares, you could say. Yes."

"He drank heavily, then?"

Kiet pointed to the enclosed area of the verandah, the lounge that offered a tinny band's rendition of disco. "A party boy?"

"I would not really classify him as a drunk," LaCroix said thoughtfully. "No. He did like a good time, though."

"In the company of ladies, yes?"

"Yes. Formerly. Recently he has visited us alone."

"May I interpret that as meaning he had a lady friend he saw elsewhere?"

LaCroix shrugged.

"I imagine you and he shared some drinks, some intimacies."

LaCroix said nothing. Kiet

patted his lips with his napkin and stretched, his eyes all the while locked on LaCroix, who could not return his gaze. We have something here, he thought.

"The shrimp were splendid."

"Thank you, superintendent."

"You know, my top assistant, young Captain Binh, studied police procedures in America. He regales me with fantastic stories. For instance, in their District of Columbia, he rode in a squad car with officers who were frustrated by a particular restaurant. The officers knew that the owner of the cafe was selling illegal drugs, but they could never catch him in the act. Do you know what they did? They cited him for sanitation violations and had its doors locked. Ingenious, don't you agree?"

"Yes," he said warily.

"Coincidentally, as I came in here today for your marvelous shrimp, I passed by your kitchen and saw flies buzzing about. Dirty, filthy flies. I may be able to find a similar sanitation law if I look hard enough at the ordinance book."

LaCroix threw up his arms. "Superintendent, this is Hickorn! Every kitchen has flies!"

Kiet stared at the Frenchman, withering him. "Who is this special woman of Walt's?"

LaCroix leaned over the table, whispering, "Superintendent, Walt was obsessed with her. He and I would sit after closing hours drinking Golden Tiger. Walt had been a swaggering lothario before, boasting of his conquests, but this woman tore him apart. He referred to her as the Dragon Lady."

"Dragon Lady?"

"Yes. He tried to explain it to me. It came from a newspaper cartoon of his youth. The Dragon Lady character was a cunning and beautiful Oriental woman."

"Her name, please."

"Superintendent—"

Kiet made a swirling motion with a fingertip. "Buzz, buzz. Dirty. Filthy."

"Madame Sarin Li."

Bamsan Kiet slumped in his chair. Madame Li was unquestionably the most beautiful woman in Luong, the wife of Minister of Finance Sipto Li, a nephew of Prince Pakse. There had been stories about her, the gossip ethereal since she was seldom seen in public. Her latest lover was said to be Brigadier General Tho. The case was starting to make sense.

"Superintendent, if certain powerful people knew the source of this information, I—"

Kiet shushed LaCroix and ordered him to swat flies and forget their conversation. On the taxicab ride to the Li villa

he drank another Golden Tiger for courage. Be careful, he told himself. If Tho didn't order him tied and blindfolded against sandbags, the cuckolded Minister Li surely would.

Minister and Madame Li lived in luxury on Avenue Dwight Eisenhower. The facade of their home was ornate stucco, and a wrought-iron gate was manned by a Luongan soldier. The soldier admitted him to a veritable garden, and a maid showed him inside.

"Superintendent, is there anything wrong?"

It was a moment before Kiet could reply. He had seen Madame Li before only at formal occasions. Standing here close to him, slim and almost as tall as he in a silk dressing gown, she was more incredibly beautiful than he remembered. He was unable to breathe, let alone speak. The Dragon Lady; perhaps that sobriquet had merit.

"Madame," he finally said, "forgive my intrusion. I am investigating a murder."

"That is terrible. But how can I help you?"

"You have not heard? An American was shot to death last night at his house on Rue Ché Guevara."

"No," she said, turning to show the maid where to place a tray she had brought into the room. "Tea, superintendent?"

"No, thank you, madame. The victim's name was David Walt."

"I do not know many Americans, superintendent, only those I meet at official functions with my husband."

Her ignorance of this sensational crime was a lie, Kiet knew. Rumors and stories and gossip scattered in the Hickory air like pollen. And it logically followed that this untruth masked a greater one. LaCroix was rarely misinformed.

Bamsan Kiet had been raised in the Christian religion, a legacy of French missionaries. A believer in the Golden Rule, he responded in kind. "Madame, I would not be troubling you about this indecorous matter if it were not for documents found at Walt's home, documents that mentioned you by name."

"What sort of documents?" she asked icily. "Documents regarding my husband? The minister does have transactions with foreigners."

"No, madame. I should be more precise. A diary."

"Would it be rude of me to drink my tea before it grows cold?"

"No, madame, not at all," Kiet said, sitting after she did, opposite her.

"My husband and I have what some term a marriage of convenience, superintendent. I was born in poverty. Did you know?"

Kiet knew, but he shook his head no.

"I am not an ugly woman," she said. "When I am at his side, he is afforded a status he might not otherwise have. Do you realize what I am saying?"

"Oh yes."

"And I am rewarded by material possessions and the security of being a member by marriage of the royal family."

Kiet said nothing.

"My relationship with Tho is no secret."

Kiet shrugged.

"I broke with him. He was becoming increasingly possessive of me, increasingly ambitious. I ignored his opium dealings as long as I could. He has a fantasy of being the military ruler of Luong, with me ruling beside him as his wife." Her voice was cracking.

"Madame, I regret causing you this pain and embarrassment—"

"My liaison with David was an accident. I had no intentions. Neither of us could help ourselves. Tho knew that we were lovers."

Kiet had maneuvered to the door. Madame Li was with him, clasping his hands, squeezing them tightly. Tears streamed down incomparably lovely cheekbones.

Kiet's heart raced, his face flushed with resolve.

"He must pay," Madame Li said.

"He will," Kiet promised. "He will."

"Superintendent! It is so late."

"Thank you for your concern, Binh, but I napped. The sidearm you wear, it is a .45 caliber automatic pistol, is it not? Identical to the weapon that killed David Walt?"

"Yes, sir," Captain Binh said, obviously puzzled.

"Good. Drive me in your Jeep to David Walt's house."

"Then what are we to do?"

Kiet threw a beefy arm around the young captain and they walked to the Jeep. "An exercise in science and logic, Binh. If our exercise bears fruit, your mentors at the District of Columbia police have the right to be extremely proud."

Kiet sat on Walt's steps, looking at the dwellings across the street. On his lap was a clipboard, outlines of the houses and apartments and their windows crudely sketched out. Inside, as directed, Binh fired his pistol into a wall of Walt's lascivious bedroom. The noise was thunderous. Within sixty seconds, curtains parted and lights came on. Kiet drew X's at all those windows.

Captain Binh joined him. "Now, sir?"

Kiet got up. "Come, come. Ballistic science has made its contribution. The rest is up to common sense and conventional police work."

"I compliment you, superintendent," said Prince Novisad Pakse, as he leaned over his billiards table, squinting at a ball, aiming his cue stick. "Your investigation was resourceful and courageous."

Kiet stood off to one side, as stiffly as his soft girth would permit. "Thank you, Your Highness."

"The securing of those witness affidavits is a tribute to your persuasive skills."

"I had hoped for more than just seven, Your Highness. Thirty-one people came to their windows, but the remainder were too frightened."

"I admire your deduction," Pakse said, shooting. A ball fell into a pocket. "People are habitual creatures. If one is up at a late hour on a given night, it follows that he would be awake at that hour on the next. Do not apologize for only seven statements. They were unanimous. General Tho and two of his men walked out of Walt's house and drove away in a Jeep a minute after the gunshot. The gen-

eral's arrogance has undone him. Our citizens are not entirely terrorized."

"I promised them protection," Kiet said. "If you had not agreed to intervene, Your Highness, I doubt if I could have kept my promises."

"I am glad you came directly to me," Prince Pakse said, circling the table, studying the array of balls. "I have suspected for some time that Tho had evil designs on Luong. I could see the contempt on his face, the contempt for an old man who prefers billiards to politics, an old man whose most conspicuous expression of neutrality is the naming of streets. Ah, which reminds me, the Russians have again rehabilitated the memory of Stalin. We shall have a ceremony soon. Avenue Charles De Gaulle will become Avenue Josef Stalin. What have we to fear from the French, eh?"

"Your policy has given us peace, Your Highness."

"A precarious policy, superintendent. But I shall play the harmless dolt for as long as I am able. I will maintain that precarious balance to the best of my ability and let the diplomats of superpowers think what they care to."

"If I may ask, Your Highness, where is General Tho?"

"When you delivered the affidavits, I summoned every general and colonel not allied to Tho and his opium. Then I summoned Tho, who could not conceal his shock at the sight of those officers."

"We struck a satisfactory compromise. Tho is en route to Hong Kong, where he will be stationed for an indefinite period as ambassador-at-large. He has much money, of course, and Hong Kong can well accommodate his appetites. Does it offend you, superintendent, to be unable to bring the David Walt murder case to a stronger conclusion?"

Bamsan Kiet smiled. "There are many unsolved crimes in Hickorn."

Prince Pakse handed him his cue. "Are you a billiards enthusiast?"

"I never really learned how to play the game, Your Highness."

"Please try. It is a delightful pastime. If your duties are not pressing, I would be honored if you would join me for a meal. I'll ask my staff to prepare our food. Fried shrimp, is it not your favorite?"

Kiet said that it was and began shooting at balls. His luck was divine today. He knew that he could not miss and he didn't.

An Honorable Profession

by Robert Gray



He is thinking about the poet Robert Browning as he slips a pound bag of Jamaican coffee into his coat pocket. Specifically, he is recalling the lines "T was a thief said the last word to Christ:/Christ took the kindness and forgave the theft."

The coffee is for his friend Georgy, who lives off a meagre pension and some beggar's change thrown his way by the government. These barely cover the necessities for Georgy. Except for his daily wine ration, there is no money left over for extras.

Dennis takes care of the extras.

It is a familiar story throughout his apartment building, a tenement that isn't considered to be in the slums because of its location a block north of the city's unofficial border. Inhabited mostly by retirees and widows, it also has its share of young girls trying desperately to hang on to their kids, with the fathers God-knows-

Illustration by Nick Jainschigg

where and the landlord breathing down their necks for last month's rent.

Victims. The world is full of victims.

For Dennis, life without a measure of dignity and self-respect is not life at all. In his quiet, unobtrusive manner, he brings his neighbors a small taste of luxury to brighten their hard lives.

He does not make a big deal out of it. This isn't the kind of neighborhood where you'd want to create the impression of excess wealth. Junkies and street punks smell money. It has the same odor as fear.

Dennis does everything he can to avoid getting a reputation as one of those old fools who stuff their millions in coffee cans and die of starvation. He knows how easily such legends develop; how the criminal mind works. After all, he has been a professional thief himself for nearly all of his seventy years on earth.

Georgy answers his door, fumbling with what sounds like a hundred locks before his fat, weary, red, Irish face, with its halo of white hair, peers around the corner. Still in his pajamas and bathrobe, he smiles his toothless smile. He already is enveloped in the pungent aroma of fermented grapes.

"Lookin' sharp this mornin', Dennis," he says, gazing in admiration at his friend's shiny wingtips, brown suit and tie, clean white shirt, and just slightly battered fedora, tilted at a jaunty angle above a thin, hawkish face.

Dennis tips his hat with one hand and presents the bag of coffee with the other. He is accustomed to being complimented on his appearance. He cultivates the distinguished, slightly threadbare look and behavior of an aging professor type, though he has been self-taught since dropping out of grammar school in the twenties to support his mother. He never neglected his reading, however, and considers himself an educated man in spite of the obstacles.

Georgy dumps yesterday's coffee grounds into his dish-cluttered sink.

"Sure smells great, Dennis, that coffee. Better than the mud I drink. But I should be givin' you somethin'. Tomorrow's your damn birthday, ain't it?"

"You invited me to breakfast, Georgy. That's enough."

Sitting at his friend's kitchen table, Dennis can hear Mrs. Ferrilli next door, yelling in Italian through the ceiling to her upstairs neighbor, Mrs. Donato, who has seven cats and one terrified parakeet. Their voices go on like that all day long, harmonizing so

well with the sounds of traffic, radios, and crying babies that he rarely notices them.

Georgy serves Dennis a slice of toast and a fried egg. It's probably all he has to give. Dennis sometimes forgets that his friends can use staples as well as luxuries. He has a mental block about stealing mundane items like bread and eggs.

He is still hungry when he leaves his building around ten thirty. Out front a ragged woman is pushing a grocery cart full of junk along the sidewalk. She tries to stop every passerby.

"You want to hear somethin' that'll make you sick? Listen . . ." she manages to blurt out before they get by her. Then she collars the next person and tries again; same ten words. She is tireless, undaunted.

Dennis nods politely as he brushes past her on his way to the bus stop. Under dark, overcast skies, he catches a bus to the city's outskirts where the new Forestdale Mall is located, a bountiful thief's-paradise of unlimited temptations and uninterested clerks.

As soon as he arrives, he enters the supermarket. He is carrying his tote bag with the false bottom that gives him nearly a third of its capacity for covert storage.

In the produce section, he studies an index card explaining the tedious history of kiwi fruit until a clerk who is stocking iceberg lettuce returns to the back room for another load.

Dennis quickly puts two leaves of Romaine lettuce and an apple in his bag. He plucks a small bunch of green grapes and nibbles them as he moves on to the bakery department, where he removes two slices from a loaf of bread and reseals the plastic wrapper.

On his way to the dairy case, he stops briefly to squeeze a little mustard between the bread slices and to pick up a quarter pound of roast beef at the deli. From a package he opened and buried a few days before, Dennis obtains an individually wrapped slice of Swiss cheese that was made in Illinois. He drinks a pint of milk for his bones, then replaces the empty carton on the shelf.

Dennis munches a few Oreos from a package somebody else has torn open. He gets a can of Medaglia d'Oro coffee for Mrs. Ferrilli, who loves to invite him down occasionally for a cup of her heavenly espresso. He will have to pick her up a new bottle of anisette, too.

The tote bag is still empty.

Dennis now places into it a dozen eggs for Georgy and the two pounds of margarine Mrs. Stein asked him to pick up for her. He waits patiently in the checkout line, his eyes scanning the area for

future reference. Being a thief is easy if you do your homework, aren't greedy, and maintain an outward appearance of unquestioned respectability.

The homework involves simple details, like knowing where the blind spots are for those mirrors along the back wall, the ones that are used to spy on customers; like knowing freight delivery schedules, the days and times when all available employees are pulled from the floor to help unload trucks.

Dennis smiles pleasantly at the cashier when it is his turn. He lifts the eggs and margarine out of the bag and thoughtfully shows her where the price marks are before setting them inside again. He reaches in his coat pocket for the ten-cents-off coupons Mrs. Stein gave him. The eggs are on sale.

After leaving the supermarket, he stops at the mall's liquor store to steal a fifth of anisette and talk about the weather with a sleepy-eyed clerk.

His final stop is the large mall department store. He walks over to the home entertainment section to catch the *News at Noon* on one of the two dozen televisions displayed along the wall in a darkened corner.

All the sets are tuned to the same channel. A pretty young woman flashes her toothy smile and runs down a list of current atrocities and hypocrisies. She is like a worried mother, cutting the bad news into little bites for her viewers. Dennis finds it no easier to swallow.

Two of the three salesmen normally in this department are out to lunch. This improves the odds considerably. Dennis has no trouble acquiring four of the top ten popular music albums, in cassette form, for some of the kids in his building. Although he doesn't share their affection for this sort of music, he gets a kick out of his growing reputation as a "hip old dude."

He no longer has the stamina of his youth. The tote bag is already getting heavy.

It is time to head home.

Dennis has to change buses near the university. He waits next to a newspaper vending machine just outside the bus stop shelter.

A well dressed woman, burdened with a briefcase and an armload of books, rushes up and acrobatically deposits her coins. She struggles to open the springloaded door.

Dennis gallantly comes to her rescue, holding the door while she

grabs her paper from the stack inside. She hurries away and he takes a copy for himself before letting the door slam shut.

The rain, which has been threatening all morning, is finally released in torrents, ripping at the dusty street as Dennis hurries inside the glass-walled shelter. Knowing he has time to kill, he puts his sandwich together and eats it while watching a few pedestrians scramble for cover with newspapers and briefcases clutched over their heads.

It is pouring too hard to last. A few minutes after the storm begins, it eases to a steady, light drizzle. Dennis crumples up the wrapping paper from his roast beef and shoves it in a mailbox just outside the shelter, a minor act of terrorism that is part of his longstanding feud with the U.S. Postal Service. But that is another story.

As the rain pounding against the glass walls abates, it is suddenly replaced by another sound, a mysterious pop-pop that seems to come from inside the nearest building, a bank. Dennis looks in that direction, through the back wall of the shelter, and sees a bearded young man, wearing dark glasses and a Yankees cap, rush from the bank. In one hand he carries a large, stuffed grocery bag. In the other, a revolver. He runs down the street, past a tobacco shop, drugstore, bar, and laundromat, then ducks into the first alley he comes to.

Buzzers and bells go off, so many of them that it sounds like every business on the street has been hit. People rush from stores and bars and diners to check out the action. Dennis leaves the shelter and walks toward the bank. Through its plate-glass window he sees people getting up from the marble tiled floor. A uniformed guard, his gun drawn, is heading for the door.

"You see that little bastard, pop?" he screams as he bursts onto the street.

Why he does so, Dennis can't say for sure. Maybe it's simple professional courtesy extended to a colleague. Without uttering a word, Dennis points in the opposite direction from the one the kid used for his escape. Waving his gun menacingly, the guard runs off as sirens become audible in the distance.

Dennis has no doubt that the young man he now sees walking casually out of that alley is the bank robber. He has managed to lose the beard, the gun, the cap, the glasses, and the money. He has also changed his shirt. He stands some distance away beside three men who have just come from one of the nearby bars, probably asking them what all the excitement is about.

The crowd gathers quickly, as crowds do. Dennis melts into the crescent of onlookers that blocks the bank entrance. Police are spending more time with crowd control than investigation.

Dennis can see three plainclothes detectives questioning the guard inside. He has an idea that at least part of that conversation has to do with an old gentleman who saw the robber get away. Dennis plants himself among the largest people he can find and takes off his hat, just to make sure he isn't spotted.

He studies the faces of the crowd like a musician at the concert of a talented young rival. He sees their captivated expressions, the secret vicarious thrill they derive from just being near a spectacle like this. He envies the bank robber his audience.

The guard is still telling his sad story, pointing animatedly in the wrong direction. Dennis knows that soon the dogs will be here, trying to pick up a scent if the rain hasn't washed away all traces.

For some reason this makes Dennis edgy: the lack of time, the dogs.

He realizes something is wrong when he adjusts the heft of his tote bag and notices that his palms are sweating. Until that moment, if the idea was in his mind at all, it hadn't chosen to make itself known to him.

He sets the bag down for a second, shakes the tension and sweat from his hands, then picks it up again. The idea now presents itself for his consideration.

All of that money can be his.

For the first time in his career, Dennis has a bad case of nerves. It seems as if everybody is watching him, including that guard, who stares at him through the window though there is no look of recognition in his anxious, angry eyes.

Dennis removes himself from the crowd. Beyond it the street is empty all the way down to the alley. Since he didn't spot the robber's face in the crowd around the bank, he guesses that the kid must be lying low in one of the bars until things cool down a bit. That is, if he hasn't already gone back for his money. Dennis isn't sure whom he fears more, the police or the robber.

Glancing over his shoulder to make sure nobody's watching, he enters the alley, which is a couple of hundred feet long and a dead end. It separates the high brick walls of the laundromat and a greasy spoon diner called Solly's Grill. The only three doors at street level have neither locks nor knobs.

Dennis fights to control his breathing as he moves deeper into

the alley, at the end of which is a stinking dumpster, overflowing with garbage and rain-drenched cardboard.

He is sweating, his shirt sticking to his back. He knows he has little time to do what has to be done, and no time to waste on the wrong strategy. He studies the trash heap carefully from end to end; decides his best bet, for starters, is a lettuce crate near the left rear corner of the dumpster. Since nearly everything else here seems to have been tossed out with careless indifference, the simple fact that the lettuce crate is right side up makes it a prime candidate.

Gingerly Dennis climbs the slick mound of cardboard, plastic bags, and rotting food scraps. He hears rats burrow deeper into the pile beneath him. Twice he slips, landing hard on his knees and soaking the legs of his pants in wet slime. He steadies himself by grabbing the side of the dumpster, then accidentally transfers the rust from his hands to the front of his shirt.

With much effort, his breath coming in short harsh gasps, Dennis manages to make it up to the lettuce crate. It has been sliced open on three sides and he lifts the cardboard top. The box is filled with soaked, discolored lettuce leaves, some as rusty as the dumpster.

Dennis rolls up his shirt and coat sleeves to the elbow. He plunges his arms into the slimy depths of the crate. His fingers brush the cold barrel of the revolver. He marks the spot, and concentrates on avoiding it as he continues his search. He doesn't want his fingerprints on anything but the cash.

As his hands reach out toward the far side of the crate, he has to lean over the edge of the dumpster. His shirt rubs against it and the cool moisture quickly soaks through, making him shiver.

He locates the shirt, the sunglasses, the baseball cap. His fingers poke through a wet paper sack.

The bills are mostly unbanded tens and twenties. He doesn't stop to count them. He tosses the cassette tapes, eggs, margarine, and apple into the darkest corner of the alley and stuffs the bills into his tote bag. Carefully he arranges the newspaper, coffee, and anisette bottle across the top.

Scrambling down the garbage pile, Dennis turns his ankle when he struggles to keep from falling. He is on the street seconds later; filthy, limping, and rich.

Dennis waits in the bus stop shelter. The bank crowd is dispersing. There are still police cars hanging around. A television news van has parked out front, and a man wearing a yellow blazer

is holding his microphone in the face of the bank guard, who tells his story one more time.

The bus stop is jammed with people, as if they had all been shipped in as extras for the crowd scene and were now being bussed home again.

Dennis checks his watch, his hand trembling so badly he has trouble reading the numbers. He is antsy to get on his bus and away from here. He has picked up a cough that won't stop. He is attracting attention. He keeps meeting the stares of the people around him, reading their suspicion and disgust. He tries not to think about how he looks to them, but can't help it. He is a mess.

His ankle is throbbing. A dark, wet splotch covers the front of his shirt. His sleeves are wrinkled and filthy. Even the money is rank, the rain having unleashed odors embedded in the paper by thousands of dirty fingers. It has been buried in wet garbage and then crammed in the tote bag. He knows there is a stench coming from him. A woman sniffs the air indignantly and retreats outside. A siren in one of the police cars goes off and Dennis nearly jumps from the bench. People stare at him again, then look quickly away.

He glances down at his bag and sees Andrew Jackson's face leering up at him where the newspaper has shifted position. He fumbles with it and the paper falls out. Desperately he clutches the top of the bag to his chest, hoping no one has seen anything. He retrieves the paper and slides it back in place. A couple more people leave the shelter.

He scares them; scares them in that peculiar way the demented shopping cart lady in front of his building would scare them, obsessed with her worthless treasures and worthless life.

Dennis stares hard at the floor. His face burns with embarrassment and humiliation. He hears the bus pull up, its engine rumbling and brakes hissing. He hears the door snap open and the bus swallow up everyone at the stop.

Everyone but Dennis.

After a long, long shower, he changes into clean clothes. Then he gets rid of everything; the suit, shirt, even the shoes and tote bag. He stuffs them in a plastic trash bag and drags it downstairs, out behind his building. He leaves it there, appropriately enough, in a dumpster.

The event doesn't rate page one the following day. They run it as a filler piece on page five with just one small photo. The story

is about a reluctant bank robber with a conscience: a bearded young man who apparently returned to the scene of his crime and deposited the stolen money in a mailbox near the bank. There is a grainy picture of the mailbox.

With an ice cube-filled plastic bag resting on his swollen ankle, Dennis sips his coffee and reads the article again and again.

He is deeply ashamed. If he isn't a thief, then he is nothing. Just another self-deluding old fool. Worthless. He feels as if something vital has been broken inside, ripped out of his heart. He knows he should go back to the mall today, even if he has to crawl, just to prove that the bank thing was an isolated incident in an otherwise respectable career, like a jockey climbing back on a horse soon after a bad fall.

But he knows he won't do that. He'll sit there, staring at the damning newsprint and replaying his singular moment of cowardice and failure. The stink of the money still clings stubbornly to his fingers. He sets down the coffee cup and rubs his hands together roughly. He thinks about Lady Macbeth trying to wash away blood that wasn't there.

When the knock comes, he doesn't answer at first, hoping whoever it is will go away. They persist, however, and he is forced to drag his tired, aching body over, fiddle with the locks, and open the door.

The dingy hallway is crowded. Mrs. Ferrilli carries a tray with fresh espresso and the bottle of anisette. Mrs. Donato has brought her prized, chipped demitasse cups, the ones that belonged to her mother in the old country. Georgy has a jug of his wine. A dozen kids flash bright, incongruously cheerful smiles. And leading this troop is Mrs. Stein, presenting for Dennis's inspection and approval an enormous birthday cake ablaze with candles.

They surge into his apartment, filling the place immediately with life, with joy, with affection. And just that quickly Dennis forgets himself, forgets his shame and disgust and fear. Instead, he notices that Mrs. Stein's shoes are falling off her feet, held together in the back with electrician's tape. And that Georgy could sure use a decent shirt or two. And that the Torres twins are holding up their pants with clothesline.

Maybe he will make that shopping trip today after all, he decides. First, of course, he'll have to steal himself another tote bag and make the necessary alterations.

Wasn't there a new canvas products store opening this week out at the mall?

FICTION

Diamond Cut Diamond

by Chris Coover

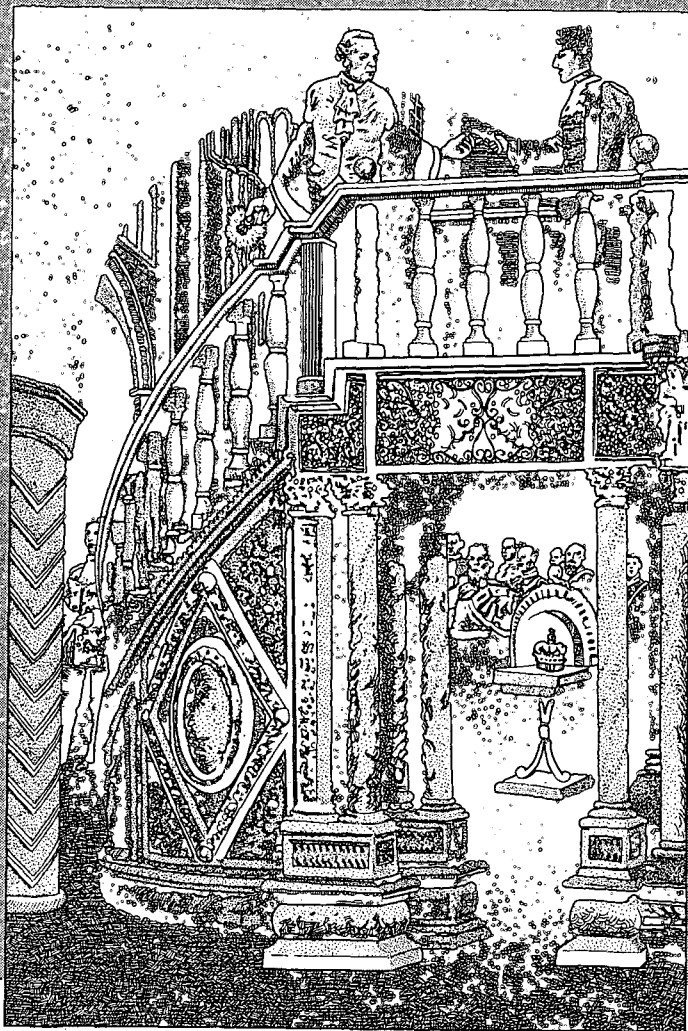


Illustration by Kurt Wallace

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The final, richly sonorous chord of Haydn's "Emperor" Quartet ended. The four musicians, pleased at their performance of a most demanding work, exhaled in unison. Before they could turn to each other to exchange congratulations, an impatient voice called loudly from the landing below.

"Zoltan, you must get ready to leave soon. Remember, the ceremony begins in less than an hour."

Zoltan sighed and reluctantly lowered his bow. Lovingly he laid his cello into its battered plush-lined case. The spell cast by the music was broken.

"Yes, Mrs. Schimmelpfennig, thank you," he called. A few seconds later they heard her heavy footsteps receding down the hallway.

"Sorry, gentlemen, but my landlady is right, as usual. Without her unerring sense of time, I would be late for everything, alas. The rehearsal must end. A pity, too; I wanted to try the *Allegro con spirito* from Haydn's 'Frog' quartet, and we seem to be in fine form this evening."

"Indeed we do, Zoltan," agreed Willi, the violist, gently wiping his instrument with a soft cloth.

Rudolph, the first violinist, an accountant in the Army Ministry of Supply, turned to-

wards Zoltan with a puzzled look.

"What ceremony are you going to, my friend?"

The question gave Zoltan occasion for another sigh. He'd hoped to keep tonight's mission to himself if possible.

"If you must know," he said, distractedly applying more resin than was necessary to his bow, "I am to attend the investiture of the Grand Marshall of the Order of St. Eustace, in the Votivkirche."

"Really?" Peter, the second violinist, an assistant conductor at the Imperial Theater, looked up in surprise from his music stand. "I thought that was one of Vienna's most prestigious and exclusive affairs." He winked at Zoltan. "No offense intended, to be sure!"

Zoltan sniffed. "Certainly, Peter, it is a very select affair. After all, a new Grand Marshall has not been invested for nearly fifteen years. Half the best blood of the Austrian aristocracy will be present, including Princess Agatha, Crown Prince Rupert, and other members of the royal family, not to mention the mayor of Vienna, most of Parliament, and an august assortment of cabinet ministers, officers, and government functionaries. The archbishop himself will officiate. Why," he asked in his most dignified tone,

"should it surprise you that I, chief detective of the Vienna Prefecture of Police, am to attend?"

"Because," Willi chuckled, "we know how poorly your full-dress coat fits, and that you are completely incapable of sitting still for the length of any long ceremony, my friend."

"Come, Zoltan," Peter said, "you can't expect to keep secrets from your best friends. What's up?"

"By the tonsils of Saint Tomasina of Tarquinia," Zoltan exclaimed. "Police matters are privileged. They are not meant to be discussed with friends, or musicians!" He glared at each of them in turn, then rose and began to pace the booklined room, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes on the rather worn carpet.

"Do you recall," he began slowly, "all that trouble last spring with the jewel-snatcher? He succeeded in grabbing, right under the noses of my men, a sizable fortune in jewelry from guests at Vienna's most select and well-protected society events: the mayor's inauguration, the christening of Herr Ziegelmann's daughter at St. Stephen's Cathedral, and the Baron von Opitz's Grand Ball."

"Ah yes," Willi said, "I recall. Wasn't it at the baron's ball that you caught him at last?

Didn't the baron give you some special commendation for the return of the jewels stolen from his guests?"

"That is true," Zoltan nodded modestly, "but no, we did not capture the thief, whose name is Pelligrini. All the jewels, including a fabulous Fabergé tiara with a huge baroque pearl, were recovered, and we arrested his accomplice, a gypsy girl who served the punch, but Pelligrini got away after the alarm was raised. Just to annoy me still further," Zoltan reddened at the recollection, "he managed, sometime during the ball, to relieve me of my official badge of office, pinned inside my lapel here." He indicated the spot on his velvet smoking jacket. "As he left, Pelligrini had the audacity to hand it, wrapped up, to one of my men and ask him to deliver it to me! Imagine my humiliation," Zoltan shook his head, "unwrapping it in front of my men!"

"Not the action of an ordinary thief," Rudolph said thoughtfully. "Didn't you see him perform once as a magician? I think you said he may be the most talented prestidigitator and conjuror since the famous Giuseppe Pinetti, or even Robert-Houdin."

"Yes," Zoltan said. "Now that he's turned to crime," he added darkly, "he may well be the

most dangerous thief since the notorious Cagliostro himself. In addition, he spent his childhood apprenticed to a gypsy circus, and learned some acrobatics and a fair amount about the art of makeup and disguise." He twisted the end of his mustache ruefully. "He is quite worrisome, this man Pelligrini."

Zoltan frowned and reached above the fireplace to straighten a framed print that hung there: a mythological scene from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* showing a nubile Daphne, hotly pursued by a robust Phoebus, turning into a laurel tree to escape his advances.

"Six days ago," he resumed his account, "one of my informants from Vienna's underworld reported that Pelligrini is still here in Vienna and that he has shown unusual interest in the preparations for tonight's investiture."

"Remarkable, Zoltan," Willi said. "So you think he will rob the well-dressed guests in the church? That should be easy to prevent, once you've been warned, shouldn't it?"

"I wish it were as simple as that. I fear Pelligrini has in mind something much more dramatic, much more profitable than the usual picking of pockets and swiping of necklaces. Think about the investiture itself for a moment," Zoltan said.

"The Order of St. Eustace is an old organization, and quite wealthy for a charitable group. More than a hundred years ago, the Order was given—" he paused—"a certain famous gem."

"Of course!" Peter exclaimed. "The great Hoffenstauffen diamond! The one mounted in the ceremonial pendant the Grand Marshall dons during the investiture. It must be worth thousands of florins!"

Zoltan hid his annoyance, for he had hoped to reveal this fact himself. "Yes, Peter, the Hoffenstauffen diamond. It was discovered by a cowherd in Madras, India, in 1745. An English duke, a notorious rake, brought it to Europe a few years later, and in 1750 was forced to sell it to a Paris jeweler to cover his gambling debts. The third Margrave of Hoffenstauffen purchased it in 1785, and his son, the fourth margrave, who died without heirs, bequeathed it, along with his country estate, to the Order of St. Eustace. He hoped the jewel would lend a special dignity and grandeur to their investiture ceremony."

"Have you seen it yourself, Zoltan?" Peter asked.

"Indeed," Zoltan replied. "Only yesterday I went to the Imperial Treasury, where it is kept."

"And?"

"It is an almost flawless stone, weighs 124.6 carats—not really large as diamonds go—but it possesses an extraordinary pale pink color. Pink diamonds," Zoltan said, "are the rarest of *all* diamonds. And, according to Herr Boskovitch, the treasurer, it is worth in excess of two hundred and fifty thousand florins."

Peter blinked in surprise. "I had no idea it could be that valuable."

Zoltan drew aside a curtain and peered out into the darkening streets. "It promises to be a miserable night," he observed. A rising wind swept heavy cloud masses overhead. "Not a night I fancy spending in that drafty cathedral."

"Will Pelligrini try to steal the Hoffenstauffen diamond tonight, Zoltan?" Willi asked softly.

Zoltan did not reply for a moment. He ran his large fingers over his balding head, scratched his neck, then answered in a rush. "No, I really can't believe he would be so bold, so foolish. There will be hundreds of people there tonight, many with eyes on the gem, for, after all, it is almost as important to the ceremony as the archbishop himself! My guard will be heavy, as you would expect: a tight cordon, doormen, un-uniformed

men throughout the church.

"No," he rubbed his chin musingly, "it will take more than a conjuror's sleight-of-hand to snatch this stone and escape with it."

"Zoltan!" bawled the discordant voice of Mrs. Schimmelpfennig, "it is half past six!"

Zoltan's coach rolled to a stop across the avenue from the Votivkirche. Even on a clouded, stormy night it was an imposing structure: the epitome of High Gothic, its pointed arches, rose window, and tall, arched entryway shone darkly in flickering gaslights. From the arch, stone demons with pointed ears leered down at the well-dressed throng about the small doorway. Far above, the cathedral's twin bell towers, by far the tallest in all Vienna, rose knifelike into the sky, the gilded orbs at their peaks hidden every so often in the low, scudding clouds.

The Votivkirche, though, was a magnificent illusion. Each carefully-shaped granite block of the majestic edifice had been cut and mortared not in the fourteenth century but in 1853. That year, a crazed assassin had tried to stab Franz Joseph as he toured the city's ramparts. Providentially his blade was deflected by the emperor's collar button. In honor of his

deliverance, three hundred thousand Viennese had contributed the vast sums needed to erect a perfect replica of a gothic cathedral, accurate in every detail, from its oak-paneled chancel and carved doors to its waterspout gargoyles. Yes, Zoltan concluded, a charming piece of fakery.

In the past few months, the church had been under repair. A scaffolding nearly obscured the massive buttresses on two sides, and the lawns about the building were littered with the workmen's rough masonry, lumber, and vats of mortar.

Inside, the smell of candle wax was stifling. It was a part of the tradition of the Order that the investiture be performed, like a medieval canonization, by candlelight alone. At least a thousand candles flickered, guttered, and smoked in the cavernous interior, most held by rows of dark-robed members of the Order.

Lieutenant Grillparzer, Zoltan's aide, caught sight of his chief and hustled to his side. "Good evening, sir! Everything is, I am pleased to report, quite well in hand. The first cordon, under Lieutenant Meyerstein, has been in place since half past three this afternoon." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "The men out of uniform are, even now, circulating among

the guests in appropriate garb. Except Private Vogel who, I fear, called in sick. Or rather, his wife reported that he was calling in sick."

Zoltan frowned. "What about Corporal Katzenellenbogen?"

"Ready, sir," Grillparzer replied, looking about to see that they were not overheard. "Some of the Order made a bit of a fuss when they learned that tonight the Hoffenstauffen diamond would be carried by one of our men. After a bit of an argument, though," Grillparzer grimaced briefly, "they were resigned to it. In fact, they even brought in a tailor to let out the waist of the fancy robes Katzenellenbogen will wear."

Zoltan suppressed a chuckle. Katzenellenbogen, built like a brewery team horse, would certainly have found his robes a bit confining.

"Good, lieutenant," Zoltan said blandly. "Carry on."

He picked his way up the crowded aisle, politely squeezing through knots of Viennese, who talked among themselves excitedly. Zoltan never tired of listening surreptitiously to the gossip and idle chatter of Vienna.

"It's all arranged then, Carl. After this stuffiness is over, we'll meet Paul and Victor at the Black Eagle Club. I hear they have a new danseuse who

does a dance of the seven veils on top of the piano!"

"I simply can't believe it, Martha. He threw up his job, with a state pension, and left his three children to run off to Paris with some confectioner's widow! His wife is suffering, they say, from nervous collapse."

"That is what he told me. On a single roll of the dice he won over sixty thousand florins. He plans to rent a villa in Venice for the season and invite all his dissolute friends to live there until he's spent every pfennig!"

"Excuse me, sir," a young man with gold-rimmed spectacles accosted Zoltan, "do you know where the press seats are to be found?" He opened the lapel of his overcoat for a moment to display the small round *Presse* emblem issued by the Imperial authorities.

"What paper are you with?" Zoltan queried suspiciously. "I've not seen you around before."

"I'm from the *Salzburgischer Beobachter*," the youngster answered with a pleased chirp. "The investiture is my first assignment with this bureau. You with one of the local papers?" he asked, eyeing Zoltan's old coat and worn collar.

"Indeed not!" Zoltan snapped. "Press seats are down there, third pew on the left." The re-

porter bustled off with a sarcastic laugh.

Across the aisle a remarkably fat man had, with considerable difficulty, risen to let a colonel and his fur-clad wife make their way to an inside seat. Zoltan's practiced eye noted the man's poorly fitted toupee and threadbare evening coat, nearly worn through at the elbows. Hardly the sort of dress expected of a guest on such an important occasion! He made a mental note to keep an eye on the man.

Ahead, a cluster of young women, all in brilliantly colored satin gowns and clutching hand-painted fans, tittered and simpered. As he drew closer, Zoltan could see the object of their flattering attentions: a short, rather handsome middle-aged man with a profusion of dark curls framing his somewhat angular face: the famous painter Hans Makart, whose studio was perhaps the most successful in Vienna and on whom the emperor himself had bestowed numerous important commissions. Makart, though in his mid-thirties, was yet unmarried, despite rumors of a secret liaison with a low-class ballet dancer.

The well-dressed, excited crowd paid little attention to Zoltan's portly figure as he made his way discreetly to the front.

of the church. He nodded almost imperceptibly to two of his men in acolytes' robes stationed close to the marble altar. Behind it ran a long, tiled corridor. At each end stood a single door that opened on narrow stairways leading, two hundred feet above, to the base of the cathedral's twin towers. Zoltan had spent two whole afternoons with Monsignor Halevy, learning the church's layout, tracing each hallway, noting each door of the huge building.

Two immense oaken doors, each nearly twenty feet in height, were set into the church's back wall. Behind them Zoltan could hear the strong gusts of wind howling hungrily through the bare trees in the deserted park behind the cathedral. These enormous doors had been opened only once in Zoltan's memory: some six years ago, at the spectacular coronation of the Grand Archduke Felix, who had insisted on being carried from the altar into the streets of Vienna on a litter borne by officers of his cavalry regiment. For that, these doors, on their massive iron hinges, had been left open. He shivered in the faint draft. That had been on a balmy day in August.

"But my dear!" shrilled a tall, white-haired woman with a sparkling necklace of rubies and pearls, "Italy is now so in-

festiged with brigands we've given up our villa in Tuscany. And Paris? Even worse, with all these bomb-throwing political radicals. No, Albert and I have decided to spend the summer in the Tyrol this year."

To her left stood a stout cavalry officer in full dress uniform, his boots shined to a mirror-like polish, his bright red dress coat flashing with campaign ribbons, decorations, and inexplicable quantities of gold braid. A scowl on his face, he looked now up, now down the aisle, as if waiting for someone. Every few moments or so he reached down and, with one gloved hand, gave the long dress sword that hung at his side a threatening shake.

A thickly bewhiskered, balding man lurched against Zoltan heavily. "Pardon me, sir," he mumbled, turning clumsily and knocking off the hat of a woman seated in the next pew. "Pardon me, madam." Zoltan bent to pick up the hat—a fantastic conglomeration of multicolored feathers, gauze, and sequins—and handed it back to its owner.

"I do believe that man is drunk!" she chattered angrily. "That's a tippler's walk, if you ask me."

She's right, Zoltan thought grimly, watching the man make his uncertain way down the

aisle in search of his seat. Rum-maging in his coat pocket for his invitation, he jostled the arm of a young cavalry officer, who spoke to him sharply. Next, his muddy feet trampled the trailing gown of an elderly matron, who fortunately did not notice. Finally he slumped into his seat.

The investiture was about to begin. Hurrying to his place, Zoltan recognized Major General Lobstein-Kirchenfüß, also resplendent in campaign ribbons and glittering Imperial decorations, talking in a loud voice to a circle of elderly men and women.

"Napoleon, I believe, was a vastly overrated military tactician. Had he observed the most basic principles of military attack and command, as set forth by Von Clausewitz, Waterloo would have been his apotheosis, not his demise," the general droned.

Zoltan mopped his forehead. It was quite warm in here, especially with all these con-founded candles and no ventilation. He stood aside with a polite bow as an old woman, hunched over a cane, wobbled by him. As she lurched past, her metal-tipped birch cane caught him a smart crack in the shin. He cursed silently, rubbing his wounded limb as she made her way to a row ahead of him and

lowered herself with demure delicacy into an aisle seat.

Just then, a gilt-robed herald mounted the steps at the altar and sounded a commanding fanfare on his polished trumpet, signaling the commencement of the ceremony. From the choir loft, the eighty-voice choir began the optimistic strains of the psalm *Ecce quam bono*, to the thunderous accompaniment of the grand organ. Zoltan had sung the same hymn many times as a choirboy, years ago in Budapest, and he found himself singing the baritone part to himself, under his breath. From the rear, the procession entered, led by a pair of acolytes swinging censers of glowing incense. In their smoky wake followed a trio of standard bearers carrying banners emblazoned with the arms of St. Eustace, a gaggle of priests, and Archbishop Haslinger himself, looking as serious as only an elderly archbishop can look on such an occasion. At his side bobbed the retiring Grand Marshall of the Order, grinning toothlessly. He was followed by the new Grand Marshall, Prince Oblowski, bareheaded and somber. Next came rows of high officers of the Order, in ceremonial robes of carmine and purple: dukes, barons, knights, and peers all of them, each trying to conceal his impatience at the slow prog-

ress of the old Grand Marshall up the aisle. In their midst, his ruddy face wide-eyed, shuffled Corporal Katzenellenbogen, his giant frame swaddled in brocaded robes of green velvet, a small cap perched on his large head. On his extended arms rode an elegant tray covered in dark plush. In its center gleamed the Hoffenstauffen diamond.

In the candlelight, even from where Zoltan sat, the jewel's brilliance was imperious. Its facets gathered the radiance of a thousand candles, compressed and amplified their light, and hurled it back into the eyes of the awestruck multitude. Like a seething coal it glittered insolently in the curtain of darkness above the aisle, the altar.

As Katzenellenbogen shuffled slowly past, Zoltan turned to study the faces of the assembled Viennese. All of them—the squinty little man at Zoltan's side; his plump wife whispering something too loudly; the severe, unsmiling Baroness Triebtschen-Dorfelmuss fanning herself across the aisle; even Crown Prince Rupert, who was conspicuous among the royal party—all were intent upon Katzenellenbogen's gleaming burden. By the femur of Saint Frobert of Freiburg! All of them, Zoltan marveled, coveted the Hoffenstauffen jewel. Was there, he wondered,

among this transfixed audience, one who coveted it enough to take action? Had the ingenious Pelligrini somehow sneaked into this select, aristocratic audience? Alarmed at this thought, Zoltan peered narrowly at the stubby, bespectacled little man seated alongside him. No, *that* could not be Pelligrini.

In the course of the next hour and a half, as the elaborate and slow-paced ceremony of investiture unfolded, Zoltan's seat grew harder and harder. The thick aroma of scented candles and incense became more and more stifling, and the whispering of his neighbor's wife grew more insistent. Zoltan fidgeted. He tore small pieces from his elegantly printed program. He counted the painted beams in the vaulted ceiling high above him, and learned that there were thirty of them, but the result of this calculation seemed somehow meaningless. During a particularly impassioned reading by the retiring Grand Marshall he wrestled mightily with an overpowering temptation to scratch his armpit. At last the climax was reached: the new Grand Marshall knelt to receive the archbishop's benediction and then the Hoffenstauffen diamond, on a fine, almost invisible, golden chain, was placed around his neck. At that moment, a jubilant hymn

burst from the choirloft. Beaming, the newly installed Grand Marshall, his arms extended in benediction, stood and faced the packed pews, then turned and was embraced by the archbishop. He lowered his head for a second and a young attendant carefully removed the necklace with its flash of light and gingerly replaced it on the plush-covered tray held by a glazed-eyed Corporal Katzenellenbogen. With a minimum of discreet jockeying, the large group about the altar took positions and began the triumphal recession up the aisle.

Zoltan uttered a silent thanks that the interminable ceremony was nearly over, and reminded himself that in a few moments the flashing stone itself, the object of his care and concern this evening, would soon be safely in its metal strongbox, surrounded by the sextet of hand-picked armed guards from the Treasury who waited in the narthex of the cathedral. He drew his watch from a vest pocket. If fortune smiled on him, he'd be home soon, early enough to settle into his favorite chair with a glass of port and that curious novel he'd begun yesterday, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, translated from some famous English author.

Indeed, the first gaggle of priests and acolytes had al-

ready shuffled past in their ceremonial tonsures. Behind them, with measured tread, came a tall pair of acolytes, each swinging an incense burner which trailed curling loops of richly aromatic smoke as they proceeded up the aisle. On their heels walked the doddering former Grand Marshall, his bright-eyed and energetic successor, and, between them, the dour and rigidly formal Archbishop Haslinger. A few steps behind, looking uncharacteristically serious and moving with some difficulty in his ornate robes, followed Corporal Katzenellenbogen. The corporal caught Zoltan's eye momentarily and lifted one eyebrow as if to reproach his chief for having assigned him such onerous duty.

A peculiar movement distracted Zoltan. Some eight rows ahead of him the old crone who'd clumsily bashed him in the ankle earlier had risen from her seat. With a sudden and forceful gesture she reached out with her long cane, hooked the chain of the censer nearest her, and, before the startled acolyte could pull it aside, threw a handful of white powder onto the smoking coals. As the acolyte reached up with one hand to free the chain from her cane, a thick, yellowish cloud of smoke began to billow from the beautifully wrought brass censer. A

gush of smoke wafted backwards and enveloped the elderly archbishop and his companions. Grand Marshall Oblowski blinked in surprise, then turned to the side, coughing uncontrollably. Archbishop Haslinger, at his first whiff of the acrid smoke, closed his rheumy eyes, lurched, unclasped his be-ringed old hands, and crumpled to the floor, his mitre tumbling off to one side. The acolyte with the censer stumbled and dropped to his knees, gasping and rubbing his eyes. The censer, the evil smoke still pouring from it, crashed against a carved pew and clattered to the floor. In the nearby pews, confusion reigned: alarmed cries rang out, and some people, blinded by the harsh smoke, stumbled into the aisle, seeking relief.

"I can't breathe!"

"Fire!"

"The archbishop's collapsed! Send for a doctor!"

Zoltan drew his silk handkerchief, pressed it to his nostrils, and, crouching close to the floor, stepped nimbly into the aisle around a group of coughing priests clustered about the fallen archbishop.

"Let me through!" he choked out, his eyes tearing in the acrid smoke. He pushed aside a retching cavalry officer stumbling toward the exit. As the

thick yellow smoke lifted momentarily, he could see Katzenellenbogen just ahead of him, leaning against a pew. The velvet cushion on which the diamond rested was clutched to his massive chest with one hand while the corporal wiped his streaming eyes with the other, coughing repeatedly. Beyond him, Zoltan saw an arm and a cane raised high in the air. The old woman! She raised something to her lips beneath her veil and a piercing, high-pitched whistle rang out.

At the instant that her cudgel began its deadly descent, Zoltan and the rest of the audience heard a protesting creak from heavy metal hinges. A frantic voice Zoltan recognized as Grillparzer's shouted. "The doors! Catch those doors!"

The church's huge and weighty rear doors swung open to admit the gusting gales of the Vienna winter. A torrent of frigid night air, which some present that night likened to a tidal wave, swept over the altar and rushed up the aisle. In an instant, virtually all the thousands of candles lighting the ceremony had been extinguished.

In the wave of sudden darkness, Zoltan found his limbs tangled in the ceremonial staff of an acolyte. He heard, though he could not see, the old woman's

cane connect with a hard object, and thought he heard a muffled groan. Kicking aside the staff with a curse, coughing uncontrollably, he careened in the direction of Katzenellenbogen, trying to crouch low to avoid both the old woman's powerful cane and the suffocating fumes she had created.

He nearly fell astride a bulk sprawled across the aisle. Dropping to his knees, his groping hands encountered folds of heavy brocade, then a stubbled chin and open mouth. Katzenellenbogen! Where the devil was that fearsome old crone? Any second he expected to feel the resounding crack of her cane against his skull. He swung his arms about over the floor, hoping to catch her by the ankle, but cracked one knuckle against a pew. His other hand found the plush-covered tray, overturned and empty.

"By the teeth of Saint Theodor, it's gone!" He drew in his breath.

"A light, strike a light!" shouted someone nearby. "My wife has fainted!"

"Sit down and don't panic!"

"Is there fire, or an earthquake?"

Another creaking of hinges was heard as Zoltan's men on duty near the altar leaned against the massive rear doors and pushed them closed, shut-

ting off the titanic wind. Candles were relighted. Zoltan could see that although Katzenellenbogen had received a powerful blow, he was not likely to be seriously injured.

"Steinbrunner, over here!" Zoltan bellowed hoarsely. His voice caught in his throat, still raw from the harsh smoke he had inhaled. Junior detective Steinbrunner elbowed his way to Zoltan's side.

"Take care of the corporal. I must go after the old woman!"

Where was she, though? The aisles were now crowded with the confused remnants of the triumphal procession, good Samaritans trying to help the archbishop or the stricken Katzenellenbogen, and a crush of fearful members of the audience. For a second, through a momentary break in the milling throng, Zoltan caught sight of her small, hunched figure, black against the white altar-cloth, as she scuttled towards the back of the church. Zoltan launched himself through the mass of people in her direction, elbowing aside acolytes, officers, priests, and well-dressed matrons.

"One side, madam! Pardon me! If you please, move! Out of my way!"

Where had she gone? Neither to the right nor left at the end of the aisle. Where then? Around

the altar? He dashed to the back of the central dais, and nearly ran down Lieutenant Grillparzer, supervising the men securing the great doors.

"Stefan! Did anyone leave through these doors?" he barked.

Grillparzer turned in surprise, and began to salute. "Uh, no, sir. No one. Some saboteur, it appears, has sawn through the main bolts of the interior locks and concealed the deed with metallic putty. A thin wire..."

Zoltan interrupted impatiently. "That does not concern me, lieutenant! Have you seen an old hunchbacked woman, darkly dressed, with a veil?"

"No, sir, but I've been facing the doors. She..."

Zoltan stamped his foot angrily and looked down the tiled corridors running perpendicular to the main aisle. Where had that witchlike old harriidan gone! The corridors were empty, but at both ends stood the narrow doors he'd inspected earlier. Of course! The stairways to the towers!

"Lieutenant, post an immediate guard at these two doors here." With a feeling of rising excitement he considered the situation. As best he could recollect from his tour and study of the cathedral's plans, the stairways behind the doors led only to the base of the lofty tow-

ers. He smacked one fist into the other palm.

"I've trapped her, it appears! Lieutenant Grillparzer," he lowered his voice conspiratorially, "should any of the Order or the press ask you, let it be known that although a reckless attempt was made to steal the Hoffenstauffen diamond, officers of the prefecture were on the scene within seconds and we are pleased to report that the famous gem is safe. Arrests will be made momentarily. Corporal Katzenellenbogen was slightly injured fighting off an unknown assailant."

Grillparzer clicked his heels smartly and gave his best military academy salute, to Zoltan's distaste.

"As you say, sir!"

"As you were, lieutenant," Zoltan said impatiently. "I am going to the tower, up this stairway," he indicated the closest door. "Wait exactly four minutes. Then have Sergeant Moller and another man enter the stairway and follow me, but tell them to remove their shoes and make as little noise as possible."

Zoltan bent to remove his own shoes as he spoke. "You and Corporal Nagli will climb the other stairway, also in stocking feet. I do not want to alarm our quarry prematurely. We will, if all goes well, meet

at the base of the towers in five or six minutes." With that he took from one of his men a candle in a sheltered holder, swung open the narrow door, and, with a determined set to his jaw, began to climb.

His feet made virtually no sound on the smooth stairs; far above, he could hear the howling of the winds around the towers and through the narrow windows that punctuated the tower stairway at intervals. He fought off a temptation to count the steps. No, better to concentrate on more important matters. He'd best be careful at the top, for he well knew that a cornered criminal is often the most unpredictable and dangerous of adversaries. Pausing by a small window to catch his breath, Zoltan drew his small service revolver from a special pocket of his vest and checked that its cylinder was loaded.

Saint Guntram help him! Was there no end to these steps, spiraling forever upward? His legs had begun to tire, and his breath came in shallow gasps. Why, even the robust Grillparzer would find himself panting! Wait! Just ahead shone a faint light, and the wind became suddenly quite loud. The top!

Peering cautiously around the last curve of the inner wall, Zoltan could see the narrow doorway that opened onto the stone

parapet of the towers' base: beyond it, a section of stone balustrade was visible against the whiteness of the moving masses of stormcloud driven before the wind. Readying his revolver, he edged cautiously through the doorway. To his left yawned a dizzying panorama of Vienna's wet, cobblestoned streets and gleaming gaslight, hundreds of feet below. From the distant street in front of the church, he could hear the faint shouts of coachmen bringing teams around to the steps of the Votivkirche, and the metallic rumble of the coaches' heavy wheels. The wind tugged at his thin dress coat. Since evening, the temperature had fallen dramatically. Ominous clouds sifting and kneading above him presaged snow squalls from the west. He made his way around the stone bulk of the right-hand tower, pressing against the damp stonework. Now the broad avenue in front of the cathedral was beneath him. He looked down with curious detachment onto the neat rows of bare-branched trees filling the park across the avenue. Its deserted and windswept walks gleamed here and there in the gaslights.

Still no sign of the old woman. Had she, then, made it safely out through those back doors? Perhaps this was a foolish pursuit.

Wait! Over the whistling of the wind in the gothic arches in the high towers, he heard a scraping, which was repeated. Continuing around the tower, he caught sight of the old woman. Her back was turned to him. She was stooped over the parapet, as if trying to calculate the hundreds of feet of empty space between the stone ledge and the freedom of the darkened side streets. As Zoltan stood, hidden in a shallow archway, she straightened and threw aside her fur-trimmed hat with its heavy veil. Again glancing over the parapet, she next discarded her long, formal coat, with its padded shoulders. She did not appear hunch-backed in her lace frock, nor very feminine. Yes, there was a decidedly masculine taper to her waist. She turned to lay the coat on the stone and Zoltan had a clear view of her face.

It had been some ten years since Zoltan had last seen Pelligrini, performing as a conjuror in a seamy Constantinople club, but those strongly marked features had changed little. Beneath a high forehead crowned with curling dark hair, Pelligrini's eyes were piercing, closely set, with long lashes; he wore a small mustache, but was otherwise clean-shaven. It was, Zoltan realized with a shiver, the man's mouth—wide-lipped,

large, showing even rows of teeth—that portrayed his essential nature. Pelligrini was magician and conjuror, pick-pocket of extraordinary skill—daring enough to attempt to steal one of Vienna's best-known gems during a public ceremony and bold enough to carry it out—but if people can be likened to animal spirits, as Zoltan's old gypsy grandmother had taught him they could, without doubt Pelligrini was at heart a ravening, voracious winter wolf.

Zoltan stepped resolutely from the shadows. "Good evening, madam. A fine evening for an investiture, was it not?"

For a fleeting instant Pelligrini's face betrayed his total dismay; then, as he recognized Zoltan and noticed the small revolver pointed at him, his expression changed: he smiled broadly, showing his perfect teeth.

"*Mon vieil ami*, Zoltan! What brings you to this lonely perch on such a godforsaken night?" He gestured at the storm-swept void beneath them. "A fine panorama, is it not? A pity the clouds are closing in so rapidly."

"I am not here for the view," Zoltan commented simply.

But both men looked outward. The storm's approach was

unmistakable, and the cloud ceiling had dropped so low that the summits of the cathedral's paired towers were entirely hidden. An occasional thick, viscous streamer of vapor passed only a few feet above them. A few large snowflakes, precursors of the flurries to come, drifted about them.

"I hope, Zoltan, that you enjoyed my masquerade? I assure you, it took me hours of practice to learn to walk as if I were really a hunchback. The difficulty, you see, lies in the rhythm of the gait. Particularly with the cane."

"No doubt," Zoltan replied curtly. "You were quite convincing, although I should have been suspicious from the moment you saw fit to whack me with that infernal cane of yours. Did you hope to cripple me so severely I couldn't pursue you after you'd made the snatch?"

"Hardly, my friend," Pelligrini chuckled. "I merely saw an opportunity for some amusing horseplay, and took advantage of it. In truth, I did not expect any pursuit at all. You see, had each element in my plan functioned according to its timetable, I'd have been down the aisle with the gem and through the rear doors before you and your men had recovered from the effects of my special incense."

"Just what was it that you threw into the censer?"

Pelligrini smiled still wider. "A simple mixture of ground sulphur and a metallic chloride, my friend. Every apprentice conjuror learns the formula. It's quite volatile when heated." His smile evaporated and with an angry gesture he kicked his discarded shawl along the stone towards Zoltan: "For once, your sterling force of detectives was too quick. The rear doors through which I was to escape were already nearly closed when I reached the back of the cathedral." He looked up, again smiling. "What matter, really? Any thief who cannot improvise in a tight situation deserves to be breaking stones for the emperor, don't you agree?"

"So here we are," Zoltan said, "at the end of a most memorable evening. Too bad that after our last encounter, at the Baron von Opitz's ball, you were not in evidence. Rude of you to have left without thanking your hosts," he added. "Your accomplice, that young gypsy girl, wasn't so fortunate. If I hadn't recommended leniency, she'd have ended up under lock and key until her dotage."

"Only fools are ever caught without an escape route. That I've learned."

"Don't be so harsh on yourself," Zoltan said with a small

smile. "It is impossible to plan for every eventuality, after all."

Pelligrini laughed. "Quite impossible, as you say. Especially when my erstwhile adversary," he bowed from the waist, "has already planned for nearly every one."

"We humble civil servants do the best we can." Zoltan feigned a bow. He reached into his coat with his free hand.

"I'm glad you chose not to steal my badge from me, this time. It was, I confess, mildly embarrassing to unwrap your little gift in front of the Baron von Opitz and all my officers."

Pelligrini's face lit up at the recollection, and he clapped his hands sharply in delight. "Ah, yes! One of my most ingenious touches. Quite a risk to take, merely for the sake of a good joke, wouldn't you say?"

"I'm learning that your jokes, Pelligrini, are usually at someone's expense. Just as your gain is certain to be another's pain."

"Oh, don't be preachy, Zoltan!" Pelligrini said impatiently. "Thievery is the way of the world, you know! Diamond cut diamond. As the priests all tell us, misery is a man's closest companion from cradle to grave. Some, like myself, simply believe that if we must all be miserable, it's best to be well-fed, well-dressed, and comfortably bedded at the same time!

"Besides," he added, "if Dame Fortune, that fickle bitch, had dealt me full pockets, I wouldn't need to reach into anyone else's."

"But, my good man!" Zoltan protested. "The jewel you stole tonight belonged to a most worthy organization whose members have dedicated their time, and, in many cases, their fortunes, to assist the destitute and infirm. Many a poor family in Vienna would be close to starvation this winter without their aid."

Pelligrini looked away with a scornful shrug and studied the clouds enveloping the high towers of the cathedral. "A way to soothe their troubled consciences, I suppose." He turned back to Zoltan, his eyes flashing. "I, at least, am no Robin Hood, and I leave charity to the rich with fat purses. I pity the poor not for their poverty, but for their sheeplike reluctance to seize what they need."

Zoltan shivered as a gust of wind whistled through the stone arches of the balustrade.

"Besides," Pelligrini added mockingly, "think how uneventful the lives of the wealthy would be, without a clever thief like myself to prick them to attention every so often."

"In my experience," Zoltan said quietly, "the sort of person who will hurt others for his own gain can be found in any class.

I've arrested stableboys for assault, professors of chemistry for embezzlement, duchesses for forgery, cabinet ministers for treason, and generals for cheating at cards. The potential for crime isn't confined to a particular group—even the destitute—nor, as Professor Lombroso, the eminent criminologist, believes, to persons with protruding ears, broad nostrils, and receding foreheads."

"Certainly not, for I have none of those features! But you're right, evil is everywhere, in all of us, whether we see it or not. Some are simply better players than others."

"No, *there* is the basic difference between us, Pelligrini. You are convinced that everyone is inherently evil, so that good is pointless. I prefer to see people as basically good, and to think their evildoing a departure from their real nature. Men are flawed, God knows! But not irrevocably."

Pelligrini waved a neatly manicured hand in a dismissive gesture. "All this philosophizing is an exercise best left for toothless priests and retired professors of rhetoric."

"Perhaps you're right." Zoltan beckoned with the revolver. "Step inside the tower, Pelligrini. It's devilish cold out here. Besides, my men will be here very shortly."

"But, Zoltan! What of the Hoffenstauffen diamond?" Pelligrini exclaimed with new animation. "Don't you wonder where it is? What if I've already passed it to a confederate inside the cathedral? Then all your efforts would be for naught."

"I don't want to wound your pride, Pelligrini, but the stone you stole was not the Hoffenstauffen at all." Zoltan smiled. "Actually, it's a fine piece of leaden glass crystal, faceted exactly like the real diamond. As you know, the lead content gives glass a high refractive index so that it resembles a diamond from a distance. Especially by candlelight. The actual stone never left the coffers of the Imperial Treasury. The escort of armed guards that supposedly brought it here was, like your own performance tonight, a skillful masquerade."

Pelligrini spat on the stone at their feet and turned about to gaze at the cloud-shrouded vista beyond the parapet. His left hand suddenly darted into his clothing, and he held up a small shiny object. He stretched back his arm, leaning his whole body backwards like a bow ready to be released, then lunged forward. His arm swept in a smooth arc over his head. "Away with you, then!" he laughed, trying to follow the stone's trajectory through the storm.

Zoltan moved not at all. After a moment, Pelligrini turned back, a crestfallen look on his handsome features. Between thumb and forefinger of his left hand, he displayed the model of the Hoffenstauffen.

"I thought you might have been trying to trick me, Zoltan. But if this had been real, you would have prevented me from destroying it. Only crystal, after all. Quite a disappointment."

A spume of wind-driven snow surged overhead. By now the snow squalls had nearly obscured the dramatic vista of radiating streets and darkened buildings spread out beneath them. For the first time, Zoltan remembered that he was in stocking feet, and noticed that the stone beneath them was like ice.

"Now, Pelligrini, pick up your disguise and let us go into the tower out of the storm."

"A fine idea." Pelligrini stooped to retrieve his hat and veil, then, closer to Zoltan, his discarded coat. With a sudden flick of his arm, without straightening up, he flung the heavy garment about Zoltan's arm and the revolver he held. Zoltan staggered backwards, trying desperately to disentangle his weapon from the confused folds of cloth. Pelligrini sprang to the balustrade, leaped upon it as if to dive into the

streets below, then reached above his head and took hold of something. Free from the accursed coat at last, Zoltan fired a single shot high into the air.

"Stop, Pelligrini!"

For a fraction of a second Pelligrini turned back towards Zoltan. His mouth was twisted into a snarl of rage, and his eyes shone with terrible intensity. Then, with a strong spring he launched himself into space.

"No!" Zoltan bellowed, throwing himself forward. In complete disbelief he watched the thin figure of Pelligrini swing slowly away from the cathedral in a delicate arc, pass between two massive, rain-streaked stone buttresses forty feet beneath, and then continue—not down but outward—away from the lofty towers of the Votivkirche. It was only then that Zoltan caught sight of the thin, tightly-stretched metal wire that ran from the stone tower at his back, over his head, to disappear out into the darkness. A cable! Hundreds of feet from the ledge where he'd stood only a moment ago, Pelligrini could still be seen, his arms above his head, clinging determinedly to some sort of pulley-like device with a loop-handle attached to it.

"By the blessed bunions of Saint Bartholomew of Brescia!" Zoltan raged, striking his

clenched fist with all his force against the hard stone balustrade. "I've allowed him to escape."

By now Pelligrini was barely visible, rolling silently in a smooth trajectory through wisps of cloud in the general direction of the rows of five story homes in the Landesgerichtstrasse less than a quarter of a mile away. Examining the tower wall behind him, Zoltan found the stout steel pin that anchored Pelligrini's escape wire. Placing his hand upon it, he could feel the distant vibration of the tackle carrying Pelligrini towards his freedom.

Grillparzer, panting and wild-eyed, burst from the door of the tower stairway, followed by several other policemen, all with drawn revolvers.

"Zoltan! What happened? Where's that old woman? Are you hurt?"

Zoltan was touched and momentarily embarrassed by the tone of concern in his lieutenant's usually unemotional voice. His anger at himself came back in a rush.

"That hunchbacked crone, of course, was Pelligrini. I was a complete fool, Stefan!" He remembered Pelligrini's prophetic remark about escape routes. "He'd planned this as an extra route of exit from the start." He indicated the taut

wire above them, stretching into the fog and cloud. "With the workmen swarming all over the cathedral, it was pathetically simple for one of his men to install this guy wire earlier today. Then, when he couldn't escape through the rear doors—thanks to your quick reaction, Stefan—he attached a pulley device just like the ones circus performers use every day to descend from the high wire, and coasted to safety."

Grillparzer sighted along the line. "Then where is he now, Zoltan?"

"Probably climbing down the drainspout of one of those fancy buildings facing Landesgerichtstrasse," Zoltan replied bitterly. "Complimenting himself on his ingenuity."

"We'll send a detachment immediately!" Grillparzer cried. "Sergeant Boberg, run down and take any men you can round up to Landesgerichtstrasse. Stop anyone you see in the streets and hold them for questioning." Boberg flung himself down the tower stairway.

Zoltan shook his head. "We've missed our chance, Stefan." He reached out and touched the guy wire. "See, the vibration has ceased. He's arrived."

Grillparzer, reaching out for the wire, caught sight of Zoltan's feet.

"You've no shoes! You must be frozen!"

Zoltan scowled down at his feet, clad in thin cotton socks, partly submerged in a puddle of rainwater and half-melted snow. With a muttered oath, he splashed across the wet stone to the tower stairway, where he paused. "Take charge, lieutenant, I'm going home."

Grillparzer saluted smartly in acknowledgment, but his chief had already turned into the darkened doorway. His wet feet slapped rhythmically against the stone as he descended the long, curving stairway.

An hour and a half later Grillparzer, his hat respectfully in hand, stepped deferentially into Zoltan's drawing room where Mrs. Schimmelpfennig was at that moment pouring boiling water from a large copper pot into a small enameled basin where Zoltan's feet were soaking.

"Good God, woman! Do you want to boil me alive?" Zoltan shouted petulantly, drawing up his feet and splashing the Oriental rug. "Not so hot, please!"

"If it is not hot," said Mrs. Schimmelpfennig, "it will do you no good. Put your feet down, I say."

Grillparzer cleared his throat.

Zoltan looked up in annoyance. "Ah, Lieutenant Grillparzer, good evening!" Mrs. Schimmelpfennig exclaimed. "Were you, too, splashing about without shoes or stockings in the rain tonight? Or did you have more sense than your chief?"

"But my good woman," Zoltan began. Mrs. Schimmelpfennig silenced him by adding another surge of hot water to the steaming bath. "And," she continued, "he has the most horrendous lump on his ankle. He'll be lucky if he can walk tomorrow."

"I'll be lucky to ever walk again, after you've parboiled my delicate feet, Mrs. Schimmelpfennig!" Zoltan exploded. Mrs. Schimmelpfennig rolled her eyes heavenward, shook her head, and departed for the kitchen to heat more water.

Grillparzer sat on a nearby hassock. "You're fortunate, my friend, to have a landlady who takes such excellent care of you."

Zoltan snorted, wiping his feet. "Fortunate! By the blessed fibula of Saint Fructuosus! Fortunate, indeed! And what do you have to report?"

"Not a great deal," Grillparzer replied with a sigh. "Mostly I came by to see that you were not stricken by pneumonia." Zoltan glared at him. "But I can tell you that we were able to

trace Pelligrini's escape wire to the roof of one of those fine homes in the Landesgerichtstrasse, as you expected. This one is owned by the wine merchant, Herr Stogden, a peculiar Englishman who spends winters in Trieste. Since the house was unoccupied, Pelligrini had no difficulty in arranging his escape."

"Or carrying it out," Zoltan added peevishly.

"Yes, he apparently landed safely. His landing broke a few tiles on the roof, so he must have been moving at a high velocity when he alighted. Then he jimmied a dormer window, passed through the house, and left by the front door. What gall he has! An unmarked coach was waiting for him outside."

"Oh, you're right that he is a bold one," Zoltan agreed, pouring two glasses of port, "and it is that which makes him an especial danger; that and his careful and imaginative planning. We must hope," he held a glass to the light and peered at its color, "that his boldness will provide a means for us to capture him, next time, by leaving no possible escape route." He handed a glass to Grillparzer.

The two men sipped gravely.

Grillparzer set down his glass and pulled a copy of the *Wiener Zeitung* from beneath his coat. "Oh yes, I brought you the morning issue, fresh from the press. On page two is a detailed account of the investiture of the Grand Marshall. In the last two paragraphs, it mentions that noxious fumes from a defective censer prostrated the archbishop and a number of celebrants and spectators. During the confusion, it says, an attempt was made by some criminal element to seize the Hoffenstauffen. The attempt was prevented by quick reaction on the part of the Imperial Police, under the command of Detective Zoltan Erdos. The Hoffenstauffen, which the reporter calls 'the crown jewel of the Order of St. Eustace,' has been safely returned to the Imperial Treasury, where it will rest until the next investiture ceremony."

"And may it be many years before the next!" Zoltan said smilingly. He upended his glass to swallow the last drops.

"Zoltan!" Mrs. Schimmelpfennig called from the hall. "Are you mad? Sit down at once and get those feet into the basin. I have more hot water here for you."

A Little Bit of the Boy

by Thomasina Weber



Illustration by George Thompson

Ruth wondered what she ought to do about their appointment with the realtor. There was not much sense in his coming way out here to talk to her and John if John was dead. It was already one o'clock and the appointment was for two. She decided to call his office and cancel it. When she did so, however, Ruth was informed that Mr. Kelly was already on his way and could not be reached. Ruth hung up, glad she had not told his secretary the reason for her call. She did not sound like a very nice person and probably would have insisted on dispatching the police and an ambulance and goodness only knows what else.

Ruth looked down at John where he lay on the kitchen floor. If she had told him once, she had told him a hundred times that his drinking would be the death of him, and it was. If he had not been drinking and using that foul language to her as they were discussing her intention of selling the farm, she would not have found it necessary to stab him with her best knife. Now she would have to finish making the cole slaw with her other knife, which was annoyingly dull.

Ruth tidied up the kitchen around John and put the cole slaw in a covered dish in the refrigerator. She abhorred disorder, maintaining that a disordered home signified a disordered mind. Ruth had always been proud of her knack for organized and logical thinking but now, for the first time, she was regretting it. She knew she would have to call the police and when she told them what had happened, they would put her in jail and in due time her case would come to trial and she would receive her just punishment for the crime she had committed. It was a dreary prospect, an unthinkable way to spend her remaining years. Maybe if she tried she could go to pieces and weep all over the arresting officers and sob in the courtroom—

The doorbell rang. Ruth glanced at the clock. It was two o'clock, time for the real estate agent to arrive. The bell rang again before she reached the front of the house.

The man who stood there was in his late thirties, tall and rather myopic with a mouthful of great horselike teeth.

"How do you do, Mrs. Grant? I'm Dick Kelly, of Kelly Real Estate. We have an appointment this afternoon?"

"I'm afraid Mr. Grant can't see you today, Mr. Kelly."

"Oh? Not sick, is he?"

"He's—indisposed."

"That's too bad." Over the top of her head the man's eyes were

taking in the room. "Do you think, as long as I'm here, I could see the house anyway?"

"Not today, Mr. Kelly."

His smile shrank a little. "I drove thirty miles to get here, Mrs. Grant. Actually, I'm mostly interested in the living room. One of the clients I have in mind has some specific requirements when it comes to living rooms. So if I could just see that—"

"Very well," said Ruth, admitting him, "but only the living room. I am not prepared to show the rest of the house."

"You did expect me today, didn't you?" he asked, walking to the middle of the floor and looking around with interest.

"Yes, but something unexpected came up."

"Well, those things happen, I guess." He stepped over to the fireplace. "A fireplace is one of her requirements, and this is a beauty, all right." He was making notes on a pad. "This little house is just what she's looking for; I'm sure of it. And is this the door to the kitchen?"

Ruth was across the room in a flash. "You cannot see the kitchen today, Mr. Kelly."

"Oh come on, Mrs. Grant, what's a few dirty dishes between friends?"

"I would like you to leave now, Mr. Kelly."

He shrugged and returned his pad to his pocket. "You're the boss, Mrs. Grant. This client I mentioned wants to be settled in a new house before fall, though, so when will I be able to bring her out for an inspection?"

"I can't tell you at the moment. I will call your office and arrange an appointment."

"All right, Mrs. Grant, you do that." There was a perceptible chill in his manner as he left. Ordinarily, it made Ruth unhappy when someone was displeased with her, but in this instance she did not care. Mr. Kelly was too brash for her liking, and today she had a lot on her mind.

She was trying to work up her courage to telephone the police when the doorbell rang again. She was surprised to see Mr. Kelly standing there. "I seem to have mislaid my pen, Mrs. Grant. Have you seen it?"

"No, I haven't."

"Would you mind if I come in and look around? I wouldn't bother, only it has sentimental value. It was a gift from my mother."

"Oh, of course. Come right in." Ruth was glad to see a man who

thought so highly of his mother. If her own son had lived, he would have been about Mr. Kelly's age now. It was something she seldom allowed herself to think about.

Suddenly Ruth snapped out of her reverie as she saw Mr. Kelly about to open the kitchen door. "Mr. Kelly!"

He turned and smiled, his horsy teeth seeming to dominate his entire face. "Yes, Mrs. Grant?"

"You were not in the kitchen at all, so I don't see how your pen could be there."

"As a matter of fact, it isn't. It's right here in my pocket."

"But you said you had mislaid it."

"A ruse, Mrs. Grant, to get back into your house. You see, I peeped in your kitchen window." His grin became wider. "Mr. Grant really is indisposed, isn't he?"

For a moment, Ruth said nothing. Then she lowered her eyes and twisted her hands together. "I was about to call the police," she said, a sob in her voice.

"Is that a fact? I hope you weren't planning to tell them he stabbed himself in the back with that knife?"

"I—I don't know what I was going to tell them. I'm so upset!"

He reached out and patted her shoulder. "Hey, take it easy, Mrs. Grant. We'll figure something out."

"We? Why should you bother with my problem? You don't even know me."

"Because you remind me of my mother," he said, "and if my mother were in a pickle like this, I'd sure want someone to help her if she needed it."

Ruth dabbed at her eyes. "You're a very sweet boy, Mr. Kelly. Your mother is certainly blessed."

"Yeah. Well. Let's see, now. The first thing to do—"

"You haven't even asked me how it happened."

"I don't have to. How could it be anything but self-defense? I mean, look at that face—and that build—and look at you, so little and helpless."

She raised her chin. "I'll have to take what's coming to me."

"I'm not so sure about that, Mrs. Grant. If you get rid of the body, who's to know that you killed him?"

"You mean—pretend he left me?"

"Men do it every day. Do you have any idea how many missing husbands there are in the United States?"

"No, but John would never have left me. He may have been a

filthy-mouthed, intolerant drunkard, but at least he was faithful."

"There's a little bit of good in all of us," he said. "But to get back to the problem at hand."

"It's kind of you to want to help me, Mr. Kelly, but I can't allow you to become involved."

"I don't want to hear another word about it. You just let me handle this."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to put the body in the trunk of your car and drive to a place I know and give him a decent burial in a nice lonely spot in the woods."

"I can't understand why you would do this for someone you never met before today."

"Contrary to what you may think, Mrs. Grant, chivalry is not dead."

She helped him roll John in a blanket, first retrieving her best knife which she placed in the sink under running water. Then together they stowed him in the trunk of John's car, her car now.

"It may take a while, Mrs. Grant. Why don't you get some rest?"

She thanked whatever powers that be who had sent her such a goodhearted man. She envied his mother. And to think she had tried to get rid of him when all the time he was the solution to her problem. If she had realized it could be solved so easily, she never would have considered calling the police. The police were not noted for leniency toward murderous people, even if they were refined middle-aged ladies.

Ruth was not in the habit of napping, so she went upstairs and took a shower. She dressed by the window, looking down at Mr. Kelly's car in the driveway. She could see at once why he had used her car to cart John away. Why did tall men invariably buy small cars? She had never seen a car like Mr. Kelly's. Its low-slung body seemed to be hunching down between the fenders as if it were getting ready to spring at someone. It looked like a car that would have spotted-fur upholstery. She went outside for a closer inspection.

It did not have spotted-fur upholstery; what it had was complete and utter disorder—books and empty cigarette packets and assorted papers and envelopes strewn all over. Ruth clucked in good-natured disapproval. Too busy to be neat! Considering what he was doing for her, it was the least she could do to tidy up his car for him.

She smiled when she discovered that he had conscientiously locked the car doors, leaving his window rolled down. No matter how manly and strong a man became, she thought, there was always a little bit of the boy in him—a part of him tender and immature that needed a mother's care.

The sun was low and the air turning cool when Mr. Kelly finally returned. He drove her car into the garage and she opened the back door for him. "Would you like a nice glass of iced tea?" she asked as he stepped into the kitchen.

"I sure would. I worked up quite a sweat out there in the woods."

"It is all taken care of, then?"

"Completely. You're a free woman."

"I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Kelly."

"Try money."

She looked at him uncomprehendingly. "Money?"

"A man has to earn a living, Mrs. Grant."

"You're quite right. Everyone should be paid for his labor." She took a small purse out of the cabinet drawer and extracted a bill. "You worked only two hours, but you may keep it all. What you did was worth every penny of it to me."

"Twenty dollars?"

"Don't protest, Mr. Kelly. I insist." She filled two glasses with ice cubes.

"Maybe you don't realize it, Mrs. Grant, but I saved your life."

"I do realize it."

"Don't you think your life is worth more than twenty dollars?"

"Considerably more, but I fail to see where that has any bearing on the amount of money I paid you."

"Let's put it this way, Mrs. Grant. Sometimes a person is paid for what he knows rather than what he does. Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly."

"Okay. So how much is it worth to you for me to keep quiet about what I know?"

"It would be worth a great deal to me, if you were in any position to tell what you know."

He laughed. "I'm in the position, all right."

"You only think you are, Mr. Kelly. Actually, I'm not obligated to give you one penny."

"How do you figure that?"

"Since you were the one to dispose of the body, you are now an accessory to my crime."

"I was only trying to help you, Mrs. Grant. I'd do as much for my own mother. But it's beginning to look as if you snookered me. However, it would be your word against mine that I had anything to do with it, if you were foolish enough to report it to the police. After all, you can hardly inform on me without informing on yourself."

"You have a point there, Mr. Kelly. But since this farm and that old car are my only assets, I would not be a bottomless well of revenue."

He smiled. "I'll settle for the title to your farm."

"So that you can make a fortune?"

"A—a fortune? What are you talking about?"

"Really, Mr. Kelly, you must think I'm awfully dumb. When you first contacted us about selling the farm, I did some investigating and learned about the developer who is very eager to buy this property. Your so-called client—the one who is so interested in the fireplace—is you yourself."

"So now you know. You must also know a man has to make a living."

"At the expense of 'helpless little ladies'?"

"It's a hard world we live in." He straightened up in his chair.

"Well, do we have a deal, Mrs. Grant?"

"No, we don't, Mr. Kelly."

"I can't believe you! You're willing to go to prison for murder?"

"You're not going to tell anyone." He laughed. "You see," she went on, "I found a certain large brown envelope in your car."

"You were snooping in my car!"

"Snooping is not a very nice word, Mr. Kelly."

"Snoops are not very nice people, Mrs. Grant! I want that envelope!"

"I'll keep it—as a sort of insurance," she said. "Tell me, do you do your own photography? And developing, also? I guess commercial establishments would balk at developing pornographic—art. And the girls—are they friends of yours?" He said nothing, but his face looked thunderous. "I assume real estate is merely a coverup for your main source of income. And I suppose you have films for rent, too."

"You seem to know a lot about the business."

"I try to keep well-informed. So you can see why I have nothing

to worry about." She smiled. "Do we have a draw, Mr. Kelly?"

"No, we don't, Mrs. Grant." He got to his feet and started for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"You want to know where I'm going? I'm going back to square one, that's where I'm going. I'm going to dig up your husband and bring him back and dump him in the middle of your kitchen floor." He stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

Ruth fidgeted, afraid they would not arrive in time, but they did. They parked their cruiser in the barn as she had instructed on the phone. There were only two officers, she was surprised to see—one to help the other if her call did not turn out to be a crank call after all. They entered with guns drawn.

"He's not here," Ruth said, "but he'll be back."

"Where's the body?" asked the taller of the two men.

"He's gone to get it."

The officers exchanged glances. "And where might it be, ma'am?" She began to wring her hands and tried to will tears into her eyes. "He—he buried it."

"And he's gone to bring it back." The officer was nodding his head.

"That's right. He should be here any minute."

"Well, ma'am," he said, clearing his throat, "I think maybe you'd —" He stopped as his buddy grabbed his arm.

"Harry, there's a car pulling in."

Ruth began to sniffle. "Don't let him hurt me," she whimpered. The policemen were peering through the blinds. "He's opening the trunk," said Harry. "My God!"

"Into the pantry," hissed the other. "We'll be right here, ma'am. Don't you be afraid. Just let him come in and get him talking."

"Yes, yes!" She was biting her lips now.

Kelly dragged the blanket-wrapped body onto the porch, then reached back with his left hand and opened the door. Ruth watched him in silence.

"Signed, sealed, and delivered," snapped Kelly as he deposited the corpse on the kitchen floor. "Now if you'll just hand over that brown—"

Ruth lifted her head and screamed. "Don't touch me!"

The pantry door burst open and Kelly, stunned into immobility,

was swiftly handcuffed. "Hey! What is this!"

"I told you he'd come back," Ruth cried. "He said I reminded him of his mother and he wouldn't hurt me if I didn't tell anyone, but I should have known he didn't mean it!"

"What are you babbling about?" shouted Kelly. "What's going on here?"

"As if you didn't know," said Ruth. "I told them how you and John argued over the sale of the farm and how John became abusive and you lost your temper and killed him and how you said you'd bury him if I gave you the farm, otherwise you'd tell them I killed him!"

"The old dame's nuts! She killed him herself! He was dead when I got here."

Ruth burst into tears.

"Just a minute," said Harry. "What I don't understand is why you brought the body back."

"Because she was going to blackmail *me*! The nerve—after all I did for her!"

Ruth smiled, thinking of the brown envelope safely hidden upstairs in case Kelly was not convicted. "That proves I'm telling the truth," she said. "If Mr. Kelly hadn't done anything wrong, I'd have no cause for blackmail, would I?"

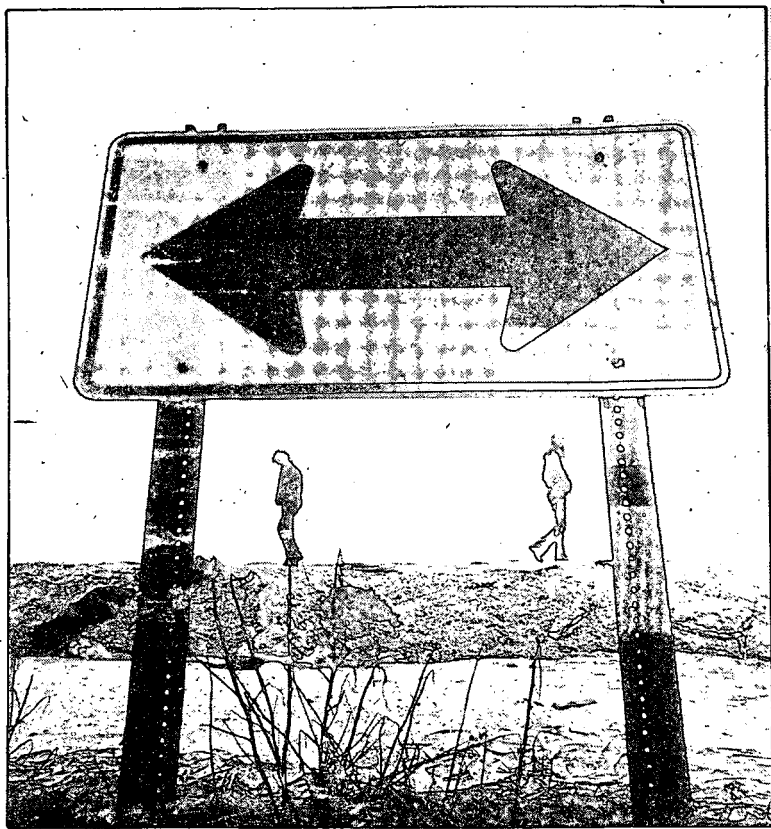
Harry left to get the cruiser from the barn, and Ruth watched the other officer lead Kelly toward the door. She felt a twinge of remorse; after all, he had done her a great favor. She glanced at the shrouded corpse on the floor and hoped they would take it away soon so that she could tidy up her kitchen.

Kelly stopped at the door and looked over his shoulder. "You're not like my mother after all," he said.

Ruth sniffed. "I don't believe you ever had a mother," she said.

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THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Arthur Tress

Well, rules are rules. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the May Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

Inspector Ueki and the Red Ape



by Ron Butler

Okayama Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki let his normal Japanese politeness fall by the wayside when I stoked up my new pipe.

"I am reluctant to ask what you are using for tobacco," he said, with an exaggerated wrinkling of the nostrils.

"This tobacco cost three hundred yen," I said, "and the pipe was another four hundred."

Ueki pushed a cotton patch through the slot of the tip of a cleaning rod, put a few drops of oil on it, and ran it through the

barrel of his unloaded revolver. "You can afford something better than a corncob pipe, Sam, and old socks would be a good substitute for the cheap ingredients you have chosen."

"Exactly," I smirked, sending a noxious cloud billowing up toward the Inspector's office ceiling. "The tobacco's terrible, and the corncob's just a convenient furnace to burn it in."

My father-in-law took a clean patch and started on the cylinders of his weapon. "You are trying to make a point, Sam.

Illustration by Jim Ceribello

That much I can tell."

I took what I thought might be a determined stance, thumbs hooked over my belt. "The point, Toshihiko, is that I'm doing this in self-defense—your cigarette smoke really gets to me. Makes the nose itch, the sinuses ache..."

"Sam," he said levelly, reloading the handgun, "you have long found my smoking in your presence unpleasant, have you not?"

"You bet," I replied behind another puff of foul smoke. "So what kind of arguments are you going to give me? Cigarettes are full of essential vitamins and minerals? They make you more alert for police work?"

"Actually, I have decided that you are right. Smoking is not healthy, and it often offends those who do not indulge. I am giving it up, Sam." With a drawn-out flourish, he stubbed out the remainder of his cigarette in an ashtray.

I was boggled and flabbergasted. "The pack. You must have a pack in one of your pockets—maybe in *all* of your pockets."

Ueki, features bland, delivered a half-full package from his shirt pocket and used his hands as a compactor before throwing it into the wastebasket by his gray metal desk.

"Lighter," I said lamely. "You can't be serious unless you toss

in the lighter, too. And matches. They might be tempting."

The inspector's disposable butane flamethrower joined the crumpled packet, and he began going through desk drawers, dumping a dozen or so books of matches. Then, with a smile I took to indicate confidence and sincerity, he walked past the filing cabinets to a wall chalkboard bearing the days of the week in Japanese characters. "No smoking!" he scrawled in English before adding the same injunction in his own language.

Credibility bloomed. "Hey, I think you're on the level! This is a great day, Toshihiko, one to remember!"

"It is nothing," he said in overtones suggestive of modesty. "My entire life has been guided by discipline, and smoking is now part of my past. But there is something I expect of you in return, Sam—a small modification of your own behavior."

"Like what? Wear more conservative ties, go to a new hair tonic? Name it. Anything to keep you away from those smelly smokes."

The inspector cleared off a space and sat down on the corner of his desk. "Noriko is a patient and understanding wife, is she not, Sam?"

That she was—and gorgeous. "Sure, but what's that got to do with anything?"

"My daughter," Ueki said after a moment of apparent deep reflection, "wants you to give up trashing, and to clean out the closets at your home."

I thought about it. At one time or another, almost everyone in my immediate family had commented on my practice of collecting what I regarded as minor treasures from the neighborhood garbage placement area.

And, new wealth in hand, I had to put it away for possible future use. Our closets seemed the most likely place. Noriko had made some comments about it, but always with an endearing smile. "I am so pleased, Sam," she would tell me, "that you find Japanese products beautiful and want to save them even after they are discarded by their owners. I fear, however, that the futons, linens, and clothing already in the closets impose limitations on what you can save."

Yumiko was blunter. The outspoken octogenarian who lived with us as nanny to our twin boys stated that only a demented person would cram closets meant for practical use with useless items.

I finetuned the mind's eye for a better assessment. On Tuesday and Thursday mornings, I could visualize myself sauntering outside before breakfast, surveying the neatly stacked

refuse by the steel railing next to the small river fronting the house. Were the neighbors watching as I sorted through the goodies, picking out a folding fan here, a torn calligraphy scroll there? Did it embarrass Noriko to know that Sam Brent, a man respected for his accomplishments in the computer hardware business, was out in plain sight, inspecting the trash?

Panning back to the house, I let my visual memory take me room to room, and concluded that Noriko and Yumiko were right to worry about my unfair occupation of so much storage space. To the Japanese, space is precious in and of itself, and the people of those crowded islands do not clutter their homes with unnecessary, bulky furniture. Most of the straw-matted rooms have closets with sliding, paper-paneled doors: the futons that come out at night are stowed away in them upon arising, and next to them is placed almost anything else that is not in constant use.

So, Noriko and Yumiko had their reasons, but I didn't want to throw away everything I'd harvested through the years. The answer, I decided, was a compromise.

"Okay, Toshihiko," I said, raising my right hand. "I solemnly swear to get rid of almost everything and not to collect anything else we don't need."

Inspector Ueki got off the desk corner and glared. "Almost? I quit smoking, ask for a minor effort to please my daughter, and you say *almost*?"

"What I mean," I hastily added, not wanting to reverse the retreat from tar and nicotine, "is that I'd like to have dibs on the top shelf in the upstairs room I use for an office. One small shelf, that's all. Is that too much?"

"I do not know," Ueki said, crossing his arms over his chest. "I am too familiar with your unwillingness to part with anything."

If there hadn't been a raucous commotion in the hall then, anger might have won out over understanding restraint. Looking out through the doorway, we watched in considerable surprise as two uniformed men half-pulled, half-dragged a lurching, muttering individual between them. The face of the man in tow was smeared with lipstick, and all he wore was the underclothing known in the States as longjohns.

"Officer Hirata?" Ueki said incredulously. "You men out there! Stop!"

In three strides, he was with them. "What is the meaning of this . . . this *disgrace*?"

One of the policemen grinned. "He is drunk, Inspector Ueki."

"*Hai*," said the other with a

snicker. "He was found in the Entertainment District tied to a concrete utility pole with a woman's kimono sash. A deliveryman saw him and called us."

Ueki's countenance erased the smiles. "Off duty, I suppose, but where are his clothes, who bound him to the pole, and—*where is his weapon*?"

"As soon as he is able to talk," the second officer said promptly, "we will find out."

"Do that!" Ueki growled. "This is intolerable."

The two officers, holding the sagging cop between them, bowed stiffly. "*Hai, wakari-mashita!*" Yes, sir!

"I detest incidents like this," Ueki said after we returned to his office. "They give deserving policemen an undeserved reputation. The very least Officer Hirata can expect is a severe reprimand. Think of it, losing his revolver!"

"Bad scene," I commiserated. "The way I figure it, one of Hirata's girlfriends probably got sore at him for something and came up with a dandy way to get even. Ergo, get him potted, off with his duds, plant some lipstick on his kisser, and tie him up for public ridicule. Not a bad deduction, hey?"

The inspector reached for his shirt pocket, then caught himself with an irritated start. "Facts are preferable to deduction, Sam, and the only ones I

have are that Hirata is a policeman, is outrageously drunk at an unseemly hour, and was discovered in the Entertainment District."

"Look," I said, "maybe he had a couple of days off, was in his civvies when he got blasted."

Ueki hit the intercom, asked the desk sergeant to check the duty roster. Officer Hirata, the answer came, had finished his shift a little before midnight.

"It is unlikely," Ueki said angrily, "that Hirata bothered to go to his home for a change of clothes at that late hour."

It occurred to me that Ueki was having early nicotine withdrawal symptoms. That would explain why he was peckish, fumbling around for smokes that were no longer there, barking at his own men. Remedial action was called for. "What say I treat us to a whiz-bang lunch at the Flower Restaurant? Iced crab, prawns, whatever you fancy."

The inspector almost smiled. "Only if you agree to call Noriko and inform her that the closets will soon be emptied of your junk."

"You bet. There are, as I said, a few things I'll want to keep, but out goes the rest—pronto!"

I used the telephone and was about to relay how grateful Noriko had sounded when a short man with the largest ears I've ever seen on a human being

walked into Ueki's office.

"You are here, Toshihiko," the caller said. "Yes, here. You are."

He laughed gleefully, rubbed the tip of his nose, and ran his hands down the buttons of a dark blue windbreaker. "Well, I am here, too, and must say hello. Hello!"

Some kind of nut? But . . . no! Ueki was bowing deeper than I would have believed possible. "Sam," the inspector said, "this is my cherished friend, Dr. Kensaku Yoshida. He is a world-famous primatologist."

"Pleased," I said, reciprocating with the bows while I wondered what a primatologist might be. Ueki's fingers were playing a tattoo against the vacant shirt pocket and I brought up the subject of lunch again, asking Dr. Yoshida if he could go with us.

He yanked a yellow wool cap down to the natural support of his ears, beaming. "Yes, I can. Indeed, yes. I know a lot about you, Mr. Brent, because Toshihiko has told me. Shall we go?"

A day of minor miracles and mysteries, I thought. Ueki goes cold turkey on cigarettes, I get talked into cleaning closets, a drunk cop shows up in his drawers, and now lunch with a man who seemed to combine the personalities of the Mad Hatter and the March Hare.

There is nothing of particular interest I recall about most of the drive through the back streets of Okayama City with Inspector Ueki and Dr. Yoshida that fair autumn day: the drone of gasoline engines, the bell of a trolley, an old woman sweeping street dust away from her front door, a petulant child scuffing his feet as his mother tried to coax him into a noodle shop.

All normal, all ordinary, until . . .

. . . from the shadows of a narrow lane, a man with a hideous face staggered directly into the path of the car. I heard the shriek of grabbing brakes, felt the jolting halt of the car, and stared in astonishment as the near-victim, seemingly oblivious to the millimeters separating him from crushing disaster, gaped foolishly and threw his arms out, scraping the paint on the hood with his fingernails as he slid to the ground.

Dr. Yoshida sat stunned, but Ueki and I scrambled out of the car and the inspector carefully turned the man over. "Officer Iwakiri," he said slowly. "Drunk . . . and like this."

The "like this" took in the plain white boxer shorts that were the man's only covering, except for a woman's kimono sash looped around his neck, his face made gruesome by slashes of crimson lipstick over

a coating of face powder.

"Another cop out on a daytime binge," I remarked, relieved to know the apparition was only a man with peculiar problems. "Maybe this guy and Officer Hirata were seeing the same woman."

Ueki's hands went into the cigarette-searching motions, then clenched and unclenched repeatedly. "Help me get him in the car, Sam. There is more to this than a three-way quarrel among lovers, and whatever it is, I am going to have the truth."

Dr. Yoshida came around to the front of the car and looked down. "Odd. Yes, quite odd."

I was betting myself that the two cops had been entangled in no more than an outlandish party when I was distracted by the approach of an incredibly beautiful woman. Graceful, supple, and lithe, she walked in feminine perfection, long black hair falling softly over her shoulders. Her closefitting, sleeveless red outfit had a design of blue-winged hummingbirds hovering about golden boughs that swept in broad arcs over its bodice to the edge of a high mandarin collar. With every other delicate step, this breathtaking ensemble parted from hem to mid-thigh on one side.

Boldly passing the scattering of people who had stopped to

watch the spectacle, she stopped a few paces from us, threw down a bundle of clothing, and gave each of us a searching look.

She spoke then, in a lovely, lilting singsong that managed to convey anger although I didn't understand a word. And when she finished, she slapped my face hard enough to make me stumble against Dr. Yoshida, turned, and drove a spiked heel into the toe of Ueki's shoe.

By the time we recovered, she was nowhere in sight, and the multiplicity of lanes and alleys offered no hope of finding her.

"I think our mystery lady was Chinese," I said as Ueki unfolded Officer Iwakiri's uniform. "The way she talked, her clothes..."

The inspector straightened, scowling at the scattering that was growing into a crowd. "Iwakiri's revolver is missing. That makes two police weapons in one day that may be in unauthorized civilian hands."

"Probably not as bad as you think, Toshihiko," I said. "That gal was worked up about something, but she didn't look like a dangerous gun moll."

"I hope you are right," Ueki said, "but you will appreciate that I cannot spare time for lunch if there is the remotest possibility that criminal elements are in possession of stolen guns."

No argument. But what kind of criminal got cops sloshed, messed up their faces with lipstick and powder, and left them with kimono sashes? Someone like the gorgeous creature who'd popped me one and jabbed Ueki in the foot for reasons unknown?

Puzzles, I firmly believe, are best solved after a solid meal. I hailed a taxi as Ueki drove off with the snoring policeman and took Dr. Yoshida to the Flower Restaurant.

On that autumn day of pale blue sky and playful mountain breezes, I learned that a primatologist is a person who studies monkeys and apes, either in the wild or at fenced-in primate centers.

I also found out, during a lunch that spilled over into the early afternoon, that Dr. Yoshida was a leading authority on orangutans, directed a new research facility near Kurashiki, a nearby city in our prefecture, and was once one of Inspector Ueki's college classmates.

"No kidding!" I said. "It's hard for me to picture Toshihiko as a college kid." I glanced at my watch, debating how much longer I could be absent from the office without incurring the wrath of Masahige Goto, my associate director.

"Ah," Dr. Yoshida went on with his reminiscing, "Toshihiko was bright. Yes, intelligent. He could have been anything he desired. Anything, yes. He did well in everything, that one."

"And he became a cop," I smiled.

"The best, Brent-san. Yes, none better, and I have long been his chief admirer. You are fortunate to have him as a father-in-law, as a friend."

"Yep," I said, "we get along pretty well."

The renowned scientist poked at his tofu with chopsticks. "Toshihiko has spoken of you often, yes. He says that you are an honest, hardworking man and a good father and husband. He also tells me that you have achieved quite a reputation in the business world and are considered an outstanding citizen of Okayama. And that," he tacked on after a moment to let me bask, "is why I want to make use of your good name in an important new project of mine. Indeed, I want support from both you and Toshihiko."

"Go ahead," I encouraged him. "Any buddy of Toshihiko's is a friend of mine." After all, I told myself, using my name to back whatever it was that Yoshida had in mind couldn't involve much.

Yoshida bowed his head in thanks. Then, as calmly as if he

were relating that summer follows spring, he said that he wanted the inspector and me to make a televised appearance with an orangutan.

I tried to match his equanimity. "Go on TV with an ape? Whatever for?"

"I want to raise public funds to expand the research center," he replied. "You see, orangutans may have little time left on this world of ours except in zoos."

I didn't see; he explained. Orangutans (he said) are native to the islands of Borneo and Sumatra, and until very recently not much was known of their natural behavior. Their name (he informed me) comes from a Malay word for "man of the woods," presumably because of their human appearance from a distance. Often killed for sport despite laws to the contrary, they also face destruction of their habitat because of population growth and the increased mining of regional resources.

"When you meet Ah-flow-dai-ti, you will understand my desire to obtain money to bring as many orangutans here as possible, to save them," he said.

"Ah-flow-dai-ti?"

"Hai," he smiled. "She is named for the Greek goddess of love."

"Aphrodite," I said, trying not to make it sound like a cor-

rection. "An ape. Ah, listen, Dr. Yoshida, I've got to call my office right away. Late, you know. Won't take much more than a minute or two." I did need to tell Goto why my lunch break was running so long. And I wanted a few moments to consider whether I had actually agreed to be on television with an orangutan, or if I was bound only by a promise of moral support—like signing a petition.

I had folded my napkin, set my chopsticks on a holder, and scooted my chair back to get up when someone placed a hand on my shoulder with a feather-light touch. It was a small, soft hand, and it was attached to a lovely young woman in a dress of clinging red with designs of hummingbirds and golden boughs. Standing near her was another woman, scowling and also beautiful, but dressed in ordinary Japanese clothes.

The one with a hand on my shoulder spoke in broken Japanese. "I find you again. Good. You tell other friends of disgusting policeman trouble to make if bothered more."

With that, she sent me toppling over in my chair while her silent companion dumped the tofu in Dr. Yoshida's lap.

"How extraordinary!" the scientist exclaimed as a lady at the next table began to scream something about the desirability of calling the police.

I closed my eyes and made a wish: that I was home doing something simple—like cleaning closets.

The hostess of the Flower Restaurant, Mrs. Ishizaka, was apologetic, Inspector Ueki was stymied, and Dr. Yoshida sat politely by as we recapitulated the events of the day.

"Neither of the two officers found drunk and stripped of clothing and weapons will talk," Ueki said as we drank strong black coffee in a private room provided by Mrs. Ishizaka after I called the inspector and asked him to come over. "Although Hirata and Iwakiri have been suspended and face an inquiry, they claim they remember nothing. And because of their missing guns, I am more concerned than ever in view of the remark that woman made about trouble."

"Yeah," I said, "that gets to me, too, along with the fact that we've got *two* mystery ladies now. Both of them are real lookers and kind of young, but I don't doubt they're serious about . . . well, about whatever it is they're after. Toshihiko's been spiked, Dr. Yoshida's had part of his lunch thrown on him, and I've suffered two other indignities."

"Another strange aspect of this affair," Ueki said, "is that

Hirata and Iwakiri both seem to be ashamed and angry at what happened. Yet they say they do not remember."

"What I think," Yoshida said as he wiped at the stubborn stain on his trousers leg with a napkin, "is that the women have mistaken us for friends of the policemen who were called 'disgusting,' although I cannot imagine what happened to cause such resentment." He looked up from the smudge and smiled.

Ueki pursed his lips, eyes on the clean ashtray in the center of the table. "I *must* find those women. Like Sam, I assume one of them is Chinese because of her dress and speech patterns. The second woman, however, said nothing that would indicate her nationality but was dressed conventionally. Well," he added with a sigh, "their descriptions have been given to my men, and there is little I can do but wait."

In a demonstration of the Japanese commitment to friends, the inspector then asked Dr. Yoshida for an elaboration on the fund-raising TV show I'd mentioned briefly, giving no sign that he was beset by more pressing matters. Yoshida went over it again, and Ueki quickly gave his assent.

Could I do less? No. I said it would be my pleasure to appear with the inspector—and Aphrodite.

"Good! Yes, good," Yoshida said. "I know that Toshihiko has much to do today, but an important businessman like you can make his own hours, Brentsan. Will you come to my home now and see Aphrodite?"

I was about to find out how important I was. After Ueki left, I excused myself to make the long-delayed telephone call to Goto.

"There is no need to tell me you will be late," he said when he answered.

"Why? It's after three, and I don't want to put everything off on your shoulders."

"I carry no heavy burdens now," he laughed. "The painters who were supposed to come tomorrow showed up after lunch today, so I have sent everyone home for a brief holiday."

"Sure you don't need me?"

"Not unless you can paint," Goto said. "Please enjoy some leisure time, and I will see you in the morning."

Mrs. Ishizaka called a cab, and I prepared to meet Aphrodite.

If, as the Japanese say, the eyes are the windows to one's essence, portals that reveal states of emotion and the quality of soul, then Aphrodite was curious, calm intelligence, viewing the world from orbs of deep brown that seemed to miss nothing.

Among the purely physical attributes that struck me as remarkable were her arms, which reached to her ankles when she stood upright (legs bowed), and her feet, which looked exactly like her hands. And then, on a more personal note, I was fascinated by her hair, red like mine (with a brownish cast) and parted naturally precisely down the middle.

This young ape with red hair lived not in a cage but as a companion in Dr. Yoshida's bachelor home. He conceded that she could not be convinced of the propriety of chopsticks as opposed to fingers and absolutely refused the pleasure of the hot evening bath. But she did nest down in her own futon next to that of Dr. Yoshida at the hour of retirement and was in every respect an ideal friend for a man who spent many hours perusing scientific treatises or preparing his own manuscripts.

"I found her in Borneo when she was less than a year old," the primatologist said. "What happened to her mother, I do not know, but I fear she was killed by two-legged predators with guns. She was alone, and close to starvation."

"Her dad?" I asked. "What about him?"

Yoshida patted Aphrodite's hand as she played with his hair. "Orangutan fathers, alas, spend most of their time off in

the wilds by themselves, up in the trees, feeding, sleeping, and thinking whatever thoughts orangutans think."

The scientist had said Aphrodite was now about four years old, and I found myself thinking of an old black and white flick (and a modern remake in color) about a giant ape that wreaked havoc before some determined aviators shot him down from his defiant stance atop a towering skyscraper.

"Won't Aphrodite be hazardous to life and limb when she's grown?"

Yoshida regarded me as if I'd shouted an obscenity at a tea ceremony. "Myth! Yes, pure myth, Brent-san!"

He told me that the great apes, unlike monkeys, were a peaceful lot. Chimps, he said, are volatile and noisy, but have never been known to attack a human being (although they do spit and throw things when upset), and the same holds true for the gorilla. This bulky but retiring ape might thump his chest if disturbed, but is more interested in finding enough vegetation to satisfy an immense appetite—and staying clear of *Homo sapiens*.

Orangutans, like Aphrodite? "There is no gentler form of life," Dr. Yoshida vowed.

"She is kind of cute and cuddly," I grinned when she came around to my side of the

low-legged table where we were drinking tea and helped herself to a rice cookie. "Probably loads of fun to have around."

The subject of my remark seemed to understand the compliment. She sat in my lap and hugged me the way a sleepy child will do when being carried to bed.

Dr. Yoshida watched my face for a time. "Why do you not take Aphrodite home with you for a few days?" he asked. "That way, you can become more familiar with her. It will, I know, improve the prospects of a successful television bid for the funds I need to raise next month. You can tell the viewing audience what delightful beings orangutans are."

Of all the things I could have said, there were many: we didn't have room, with the twins and all; I've got a lot of work ahead of me at the office; I'm not sure how my family would feel about it; I don't know a thing about caring for a young orangutan.

What I did come up with was—why not?

What was a couple of days? If Aphrodite turned out to be more than we could handle, I could have her back with Dr. Yoshida in a jiffy.

The scientist beamed when I gave him my decision. "She eats fruits and vegetables, is toilet trained, and needs affectionate attention. That's all."

"Easy enough, but won't she miss you?"

Dr. Yoshida got up, walked around the table, and picked Aphrodite up. "Please stay with the Brent family for a while, my precious. I will come to visit often."

Aphrodite stuck a finger in her mouth, contemplated him with soulful eyes, and returned to my lap.

Dr. Yoshida pulled on his cap. "Allow me to drive you to your home, then. Aphrodite will be quite comfortable in the presence of your children."

I had what I thought was a better idea. Yoshida could let me off at the office building. That way I could pick up my car after checking out the painting job Goto was supervising.

And beyond that, I relished the prospect of what Goto would say when I made my entrance with Aphrodite. After that, I could spring the same surprise on my family.

They'd love it.

A redhaired, blue-eyed foreigner walking hand in hand with a red-haired ape in Japan could not reasonably expect to be ignored, and I wasn't.

There was a bit of commotion in the parking lot when Dr. Yoshida let us out. One fellow slammed a car door on his thumb (thankfully with no major

damage); another approached a total stranger (me) to ask personal questions; a third offered to buy Aphrodite on the spot ("Could I teach her to carry my golf bag?").

And in the elevator a trio of secretaries wavered between apprehension and excitement until a few words on my part set off a flurry of petting, cooing, and happy laughter that continued when I got off and turned to bow farewell, hiking Aphrodite up to a piggyback position as the doors closed.

Goto's eyes did widen perceptibly when he saw us, and one of the painters on a ladder dropped his brush. Following that, there came the outpouring of affection from Goto and the painters that the Japanese reserve for children. I was thoroughly enjoying the scene when Inspector Ueki walked in.

"I see you have borrowed Dr. Yoshida's ape," he said in a tired voice. "Do you mind if I go rest in your office for a moment?"

"Sure," I said. "Come on, Aphrodite, let's go hear what Toshihiko has to say."

She regarded me mournfully, then turned back to something that was of more interest—Goto's elastic sleeve garters.

Ueki and I went into my office and took seats on the sofas. "You look a little down in the mouth," I said. "Something to

do with our lady friends?"

Ueki clasped his hands together, head hanging. "For every step I have tried to take forward today, I seem to have gone two in the opposite direction."

"No leads?"

The inspector untied a shoe, let it fall to the carpeting, and rubbed his toes. "Nothing. No results from my men, nothing from the police files, nothing from informants. Zero."

It was out of character for Inspector Ueki to take the normal obstacles and pitfalls of a difficult investigation so personally, and I attributed most of his despondency to going without cigarettes for so many hours. He needed constant cheering up.

"I've got an idea," I said, my nose twitching from the smell of the paint.

Ueki looked at me skeptically. "Could it be that I have overlooked some basic police procedure?"

"Nope. My recommendation is for you and Hanako to come over later for one of Noriko's gangbuster meals. They always seem to spark the old mental processes, and you did miss out on lunch."

The inspector smiled wanly. "It is true that my wife shares my appreciation of our daughter's culinary skills. Yes, we will come to your house as soon

as I can get away from headquarters."

A burst of laughter caught my attention, and I went out into the room where the clerks and secretaries worked. Aphrodite was up on a ladder, wielding a paintbrush.

I held out my arms. "Let's go, gal. I know two little boys who are about to get the thrill of their lives."

In the semi-pout I'd come to take for her normal expression, Aphrodite fixed her big brown eyes on mine, smacked her lips, and in the only rapid motion I'd seen her make . . .

. . . wiped the dripping brush across my face.

I couldn't see much until the green haze of paint was being removed by a soaked washcloth, but I heard plenty: Goto's muffled laughter, a painter yelling for his partner to get the brush away from Aphrodite, the crash of a falling ladder, the ringing of my telephone, and, some minutes later, Inspector Ueki's voice.

"Sam."

"Yeah, go on. Split your sides."

"I have just heard from the police surgeon," Ueki said, "and he gave me the results of the blood tests he made to see how intoxicated Officers Hirata and Iwakiri were."

I took the cloth from Goto, who'd been listening with in-

terest, and rubbed at my smarting eyes. "You didn't need a test to tell they were pickled."

Ueki took a deep breath and went on. "The findings will be used at the inquiry, Sam. What I am trying to tell you is that the results also showed high levels of chloral hydrate in both men. That is a drug sometimes put into a person's drink to induce extreme lethargy or unconsciousness."

"It sounds like they were together when someone slipped them the Mickey Finns," I said. "Anyone think of that?"

Ueki groaned and stared up at the ceiling. "Yes, they were on foot patrol together in the Entertainment District, and I forgot to tell you. My mind is not functioning well today, Sam."

"Skip it," I said with contrived cheer. "I forgot to mention that the office was being painted."

Ueki looked up morosely. "And I did not notice even that!"

"Look," I said, fishing around for a way to brighter outlooks, "as long as you're coming over for chow tonight, I've been thinking I might break out that bottle of bourbon I've been keeping for a special occasion. You know, the hundred-proof stuff."

"Mmm," he said with a note of enthusiasm. "Maybe you are right, Sam. I should try to re-

lax. Now, if you can persuade your friend here to return the car keys she has just purloined from my jacket, I will go back to my desk and see what new problems have arisen."

"Aphrodite!" I admonished. "Give Toshihiko his keys!"

She looked at me curiously, loped off to the other side of the room, and lowered them into an open paint bucket.

Goto rinsed them off and, before we left, called me aside to ask what was wrong with the inspector.

"Just quit smoking today."

"Ah, so. That explains everything. I hope all works out well, and, Brent-san . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Keep an eye on the ape."

In the diary I often threaten to start but never do, there would be a list of things not to do more than once. At the top, with no fewer than four stars in the margin, would be driving through Okayama, Japan, with an orangutan unaccustomed to passenger etiquette.

When we rode with Dr. Yoshida, Aphrodite had been occupied with a succession of fruits parceled out by the scientist. With me alone, she clambered to and from the front and back seats, tried to shift gears at inconvenient times, emptied the dash compartment, and, with the utmost serenity, returned

the stares of startled drivers who chanced to be alongside.

We did make it home, however, and Aphrodite was greeted in style by the whole family waiting outside the entranceway. Forewarned by a thoughtful call from Dr. Yoshida, Noriko had hurried to a grocery near the house to purchase sweet oranges, grapes, and an assortment of vegetables. Our boys, Kenji and Jotaro, selected toys they thought an orangutan would play with, and Yumiko took out her broom. "In case that animal becomes unruly," she said.

As it turned out, Aphrodite loved the fruit, shunned the skates and other wheeled playthings, and won Yumiko over by holding the old woman's hand and tagging along obediently when the whereabouts of the john were made known to her.

Yumiko and the boys took Aphrodite out to the garden, and I spent the better part of an hour with Noriko in the kitchen while she sliced strips of sashimi and added seasoning to the salted water the prawns would be cooked in. I told her about the cops who'd been suspended, the two women, and her father's frame of mind.

"Father," she smiled, "will regain his balance when he recovers the guns. And when he sees you working on the closets,

he will feel that he is not alone in his resolution for improvement."

I received the indirect suggestion with a smile. "I'll get started as soon as we eat, love."

Toshihiko and Hanako Ueki arrived at seven. I fixed the drinks and we walked out to the garden, where most of the neighbors and their kids were taking turns hand-feeding grapes to Aphrodite. The inspector watched listlessly, and Hanako and I both noticed.

"Want to go in, get away from the noise?" I asked.

"Yes, please go and talk to Noriko," Mrs. Ueki said with concern. "She is, I think, the best medicine to help you recover from this . . . this *spell*."

The inspector nodded, and we went back inside to the kitchen table.

"In truth," Ueki said, "it is not only my refraining from smoking that weighs so heavily on me. It is this confounding case." He took a swallow of his drink and poured in more water from the pitcher. "I can make no headway on the guns or the motive behind what seems to be a vendetta against the officers and their presumed friends until I find the two women. The one in Chinese garb—Hummingbirds—would stand out in any crowd. Her exotic appearance alone should make it easy to locate her, but Okayama is

a large city. This could take days, weeks if my luck does not improve."

"Hummingbirds!" I said. "Good nickname, Toshihiko, and we can call her associate No Name Yet until we have her real handle."

Noriko shushed me with a loving-but-firm look. "Father, do not some of the disreputable clubs and cabarets import attractive young women such as have been described? That is where I would look."

The inspector smacked a hand against his forehead. "I require a brain transplant! *Hai*, Noriko, of course, and I am proud to be your father!"

"What the heck are you talking about?" I said.

Ueki, psychic batteries recharged, explained. In recent years (he said) Japan had been experiencing an influx of illegal aliens—young women. Most were from Thailand, and some made their way into the country on tourist visas from South Korea, other Asian nations, and the Philippines. During the twelve month period preceding this Year of the Ox, he continued, more than two thousand of these women were deported after they were found working for unscrupulous nightclub and cabaret owners.

I plunked another ice cube into my drink. "Why risk it?"

"Money," Ueki said. "They

have read that legitimately hired foreign entertainers can earn more in one month in Japan than in six months at home. Motivated by the lure of good pay, they chance illicit employment, but many of them are forced to work for slave wages, unwilling to seek police help because of their illegal status."

"Okay," I said, "I see where you're headed. You're going to send your men around to all the sleazy night spots to see if Hummingbirds and No Name Yet are part of the illegal population?"

"I think not, Sam," the inspector said thoughtfully. "I want to proceed in such a way that we do not frighten anyone away or alert them to my plans. I think a quiet, unobtrusive investigation is called for. Cooperative testimony is going to be essential for discovering how many of these people may be here, where they are employed, and how they have managed to avoid detection and deportation."

"Wow!" I said. "Now you're thinking Officers Hirata and Iwakiri might have been running a little protection racket, right?"

"Yes," he said, "and we also may find that today's unusual episodes—the angry women and the missing weapons—were part of a protest against intolerable conditions. Tomorrow morning,

after a good night's sleep, I will make out assignments for my best undercover detectives."

We summoned the rest of the clan for dinner, and Ueki and I went upstairs afterwards for my initial excavations in our storage spaces.

A hand appeared before me, opening, opening . . . a closet. A face, beautiful, above a mandarin collar, clothes in red, red, red, like red smears on a deathly white face. A hairy arm then, a long arm of red, clutching at me, pulling, and . . .

. . . I sat up in the futon, heard Noriko's even breathing, felt a bulk by my side, pulled down the covers. By the early light of a new day, I saw the orangutan, relaxed, eyes open and inquisitive. Aphrodite! The imp must have sneaked down from the boys' room after we went to bed and cosied down between us. Without meaning to, I laughed aloud.

"Are you all right, husband?" Noriko asked sleepily.

"Only a dream from eating too much red-hot sauce with those prawns," I smiled. "And if you hear someone snoring, it's not me."

I took time for a leisurely breakfast and left for work.

At nine I sneezed, at ten I wheezed, and Goto sent me

home. "My diagnosis," he said, "is that you are allergic to the lingering paint fumes."

Peering at him through reddened eyes, I agreed. "Okay, but if anything urgent comes up, let me know."

Goto said he'd do just that and I departed after trying to call Ueki. He wasn't in his office, so I left a message with the desk sergeant.

By noon, I'd recovered enough to go for a stroll around the rice paddy with the boys and Aphrodite, and at one Noriko herded Kenji, Jotaro, and Yumiko into the car for an afternoon of shopping and an expedition to the park.

At two, I was getting bored, and took Aphrodite and a supply of grapes upstairs so I could carry on with the closet cleaning that I'd managed to slow to a snail's pace the night before. I'd hauled down a couple of the bulkier items when I heard the crunch of tires on the gravel lane by the house. Inspector Ueki was with me in a short time, shucking tie and jacket on the tatami.

"You look better today," I commented, handing him a folding wood pillow with broken hinges.

Ueki dumped it on the straw matting. "My men have their assignments and will commence canvassing the seedier establishments in the Enter-

tainment District tonight. I will be at my desk to coordinate their work, so I have taken the rest of the day off."

I struggled with a battered bronze hibachi with no handles and a rent in one side. "This is going to take me forever."

"Forever," he grinned, "is how long I feel I have been without a cigarette."

Toward the back of the upper shelf, I saw a plastic toy gun with a broken grip. "Must've put this away to fix up for the boys. Look, it's still got a roll of caps in it. Want it to play with, Aphrodite?"

She glanced up from the corner where she'd been lounging with a cluster of juicy purple grapes, and I slid it across the tatami. She held it this way and that, touched it to her lips, shook it, and eventually got the trigger pulled.

The report was loud. Aphrodite dashed the offending object against a wall, hooted, and went into what I can best describe as a scuttling, sideways, crab doodle waltz, veering off, sidling near, circling back with arms outspread until she was close enough to stomp it. When the toy was rendered into bits, she returned to her grapes.

"I don't think she likes guns," I said.

Ueki pulled his jacket on. "I should keep my holster out of sight."

I had my hands full with a dozen or so old kitchen knives whose blades and bamboo handles showed various degrees of disrepair when the telephone rang. "Wouldn't you know it? Mind getting that, Toshihiko?"

He went downstairs. When he got back, I was pulling out a straw raincoat that would be good as new if someone could reweave it.

"It was a Miss Liu, a woman who speaks a poor grade of Japanese," Ueki said with a bemused expression. "It was difficult following her words, but she asked for you and I offered to take a message. And then, Sam, she asked if I was the police inspector who is related to you. She said if both of us would go to the cabaret where she works, she would apologize for everything that happened to us, tell us why Hirata and Iwakiri got into trouble, and return the guns—something about a regrettable oversight."

I forgot about the tattered raincoat—and everything else on the shelves. "Sounds fishy to me. How'd she know our names, where to find us—things like that?"

"I was suspicious about that, too, Sam, but her story is credible. Miss Liu, who can be none other than Hummingbirds, said she felt guilty about her rudeness and went back to the Flower Restaurant to tell the

owner how sorry she was for the disturbance she caused with another girl from the cabaret. Apparently Mrs. Ishizaka gave our names when she was convinced the Chinese woman wanted to extend her regrets personally."

I still wasn't wholly satisfied—not yet. "All right, but did Hummingbirds Liu mention Dr. Yoshida? If she knows who we are, she should have his name, too, in order to round out the apologies."

Ueki smiled. "It is conceivable, Sam, that you forgot to introduce Yoshida to Mrs. Ishizaka when you took him to lunch."

"There you go! We both need cerebral transplants. Anyway, if Hummingbirds knows you're a cop, she's not setting a trap and she's probably not an illegal alien, either. I say let's go."

"I am ready," the inspector said, "for a trip to the Green Jade Palace."

I glanced over at Aphrodite. "Uh-oh! Can't leave our friend here in the house alone."

"Then there is no choice," Ueki said. "Bring her along and she can wait in the car while we talk to Miss Liu."

On our way out, I picked up more grapes from the kitchen. "This ought to keep you out of mischief, gal." Aphrodite took my hand and followed us to the car.

In the afternoon shadows of the deserted street, the Green Jade Palace reminded me of an upended domino, white-trimmed windows standing out in relief against the narrow, darkened facade. Inspector Ueki pulled his car close to a wall and parked. Aphrodite seemed content with her fruit, so we got out and went to the cabaret door.

The inspector knocked, then tried the knob when no one answered. The door swung back on a murky interior, unlit save for a subdued green light that came from the center of the room. As we neared the source, we saw a translucent Oriental palace in miniature made of some thin, polished stone illuminated from within by a small electric bulb.

Absorbed, enthralled by the intricacy of detail, I was momentarily disoriented by a sudden explosion of light. Next to a circular bar, hand on a wall switch, was the woman dubbed Hummingbirds by Inspector Ueki. This time, she was dressed in green, with the same avian design in gold.

She walked past us to the staircase without meeting our eyes. "To come with me. Please." She didn't seem at all apologetic to me, but maybe under the circumstances she was just being reserved.

Ascending the stairs slowly, hand sliding over the low railing, I observed that the second floor was taken up by semi-private cubicles with beaded curtains. The third story was the cabaret, tables and chairs forming a half circle around a spotlighted platform for musicians and other entertainers.

Our destination, the fourth and topmost floor, appeared to be for banquets. Long, low tables with lighted candles in tinted glass holders took up most of the room. Each held a gas cooker for meals that I felt safe in assuming were prepared by beautiful young women.

Standing at the top of the stairwell was a woman in a pale lavender skirt and blouse. In one hand she held a folding fan, and in the other, a gun. It was pointed at us, and her finger was taut on the trigger.

"I am Chie Sunada," she smiled unpleasantly, "and it is time you had a last drink. Miss Liu, you have served your purpose. Sit down with the gentlemen, and do not move!"

Chie Sunada, formerly known as No Name Yet, forced us to sit on the matting and took a place in front of us with her back to the stairs, legs tucked beneath her on a brocaded cushion. Miss Liu was crying, and all three of us, at the point of one of the

missing police revolvers, found it hard to refrain from looking at the three glasses set out on a tray before us.

The amber liquid looked and smelled like domestic brandy, but the drops Chie Sunada added from a vial were not, and I wondered how long she intended us to sleep—and why.

"I will give you a few minutes more before I leave you," she said, "but only if Miss Liu ceases that childish blubbery. If she was ignorant enough to consider me a friend, it was stupidity matched only by letting me persuade her to entice you here with some plausible lies. The poor girl actually thought that I wanted you in my cabaret to reprimand you for consorting with oafish policemen."

Miss Liu flashed an angry look at Chie, hiccupped, and edged a little closer to me. "I quiet. I see too late. You evil!"

Chie switched the fan to her right hand, the gun to her left, and proudly began to outline her past criminal achievements—and our present predicament.

Two years ago (she recounted) she bought a second-rate snack bar with her dowry to augment her husband's modest salary as a civil servant in the alien registration section of City Hall. Business was slow until the day a woman on vacation from a boring bank job

in Hong Kong walked in for tea and a sandwich. Noting how every man in the place was enchanted, Chie offered the welcome newcomer—Miss Liu—a job. Miss Liu, adventurous of spirit, consented and returned to Hong Kong while Chie undertook the necessary legal applications to sponsor her.

The bureaucratic mills ground slowly, and months passed before the necessary visa was granted and Miss Liu was able to come back and obtain the required papers.

Miss Liu, whose only duty was to look pretty, was a great success, packing Chie's establishment every night. Encouraged by the flood of money, Chie sold the bar and invested in a cabaret. Operating expenses proved to be high, however, and Chie arrived at her grand scheme.

She was acquainted with a number of women in the entertainment business in Tokyo and other cities. Often she heard them tell of exquisite foreigners who sought to remain in Japan clandestinely. Chie—with a substantial outpouring of money—arranged for some of the better prospects to be sent to her, and then sweet-talked her husband, Naoyuki Sunada, into bypassing the arduous, time-consuming procedures of officialdom by forging a document from time to time.

All that was required of him was to enter a name and photograph in one of the blank registration books in his desk and then stamp it with the appropriate seals. By this uncomplicated act, women on tourist visas acquired the papers they needed to work.

It would not do, of course, for these women to know that their employer was skimming off a large portion of their earnings for services performed at no cost by her husband. Accordingly, Chie fabricated a story of having to make many gifts, many donations, to certain unnamed authorities to save the young foreigners from uncere- monious deportation.

For Chie, the operation was perfect: she brought men by droves into her establishment and paid token wages.

And so, the hands of the clock moved round and round, the pages of the calendar were turned, and the money rolled in. It was all easy, all simple, until the hour Officers Hirata and Iwakiri finished their night shift and decided to grab a sociable drink or two at the Green Jade Palace, in their patrol sector.

Instead, they had a few too many, turned obnoxious with the dancers, singers, and Miss Liu, and dropped broad hints about how they might call in the vice squad to check the

scanty costumes unless all their wants (including food and drink) were met, free of charge.

Chie Sunada, who preferred taking to giving, appealed to their dignity as law officers, but the ruckus grew and Chie needed to do something before she began to lose valuable customers.

How to shut them up, teach them a lesson, and make sure they would not come back? Out with the knockout drops she kept handy for the occasional rowdy imbibor who incorrectly assumed that skimpy clothing in the Green Jade Palace implied a brothel. She laced their drinks, smilingly conducted them to an isolated cubicle, and, while they were still capable of comprehension, told them precisely what she would say to their superiors about bribe-soliciting cops if they showed their faces again.

Then, before the roosters crowed, Chie and some of the hired help dragged the oblivious policemen outside after they were stripped and decorated with symbols of femininity. Would *any* man so humiliated dare say where he had been and what had been done by mere women? And if they did complain, what harm could come? As far as anyone could tell, all of Chie's stunning employees were legally registered.

The young women pitched in eagerly when Chie told them the uncouth officers were attempting to extort money for protection that was already being provided by important officials.

Only . . . the foolish and tender-hearted Miss Liu intervened. She detested the officers for their contemptible behavior, but she also worried that they were drunk enough to shoot someone, even themselves, and kindly removed their weapons, which she put in a cubicle. And when one of the policemen recovered his wits sufficiently at high noon to crawl back to the cabaret through little-used back alleys, begging for his clothing, Miss Liu took mercy.

Only . . . the man was slipping into and out of the rational world, and he staggered off while Miss Liu was gathering up his uniform. She ran after him, to the dark lane from which he walked into the path of Ueki's car.

There, mistaking the inspector, Dr. Yoshida, and "the one with red hair" as friends of the incapacitated officer, Miss Liu (she *never* stops to think, that one) recalled the loutish behavior of the officers of the night before, yielded to a temper tantrum, and slapped and kicked the strangers.

Chie Sunada, now glaring at the frightened young Chinese

woman cowering between us, put down the fan and nudged the tray with the glasses closer to us. "Soon you will drink a toast to me, and I will move on, but not before I tell what else this . . . this *fool* managed to do."

Miss Liu, who always told Chie everything as younger sister would to older, cheerfully talked about the weapons she had hidden in the cabaret (will they have to pay for them?) and what had transpired when she ran outside to catch the man who made his way back to the cabaret.

Chie seethed. Miss Liu's fit of bad temper served only to call attention to herself. It was unlikely that the men she assaulted knew the drugged police officer (could one expect fate to bend the rules so far as to have his friends at the exact point where the officer stumbled into the path of their car?).

That was bad—the unknown always carried an element of risk. But the revolvers were a real threat. The policemen might seal their lips to preserve their male egos, but their superiors would not overlook the loss of weapons. No, they would investigate, and the unsophisticated foreign girls would not be able to dissemble if interrogated. Was there a way out, a way to salvage anything?

Yes! Remove the evidence

—all of the evidence! Start anew with the help of a husband so conveniently placed in City Hall. To do that, however, she would have to maintain the trust of the foreign women, including that addlebrained Miss Liu, until all was ready. In the meanwhile, everything must appear normal, no one must think anything was wrong.

Thus, when Miss Liu asked if they could go out for a nice lunch, Chie agreed. They took a taxi, went downtown, and were trying to choose a place when Miss Liu saw Dr. Yoshida and me sitting in the Flower Restaurant—and barged in.

"I recognized you then, Sam Brent," Chie Sunada said with a malicious smile. "You are known to almost anyone who watches television or reads the newspapers. Naturally, a good part of the publicity concerns your father-in-law, Inspector Ueki. I realized then that I had to act quickly, because the two of you are known for working together."

"So," Ueki said, "that is how you came to have Miss Liu make a telephone call to Sam's house and issue your invitation."

Chie's look was of sheer malevolence. "Before that, I called Police Headquarters myself. A policeman told me that you had taken the rest of the day off. He did not know where you were,

but said that you often spent time with Mr. Brent. How fortunate for me!"

"Fortunate?" I said. "Why?"

She laughed, and it was like hearing a fingernail scraped across a chalkboard. "Because, Mr. Brent, it was Toshihiko Ueki who answered your home telephone. I know because I listened in at Miss Liu's side in case she blundered and I had to cut off the conversation. Do you understand? If your wife or someone other than the inspector had answered, I would not have been so certain that I could get both of you here without anyone's being aware of it!"

There were gaps in her reasoning. I could have written a note for Noriko, Ueki could have let headquarters know where we were going. But what mattered now was that we *had* been trapped, and a simple trip to the Land of Nod via knockout drops seemed too mild for a woman filled with hatred. "Why'd you come into the restaurant with Miss Liu, dump stuff on . . . on the man who was with us," I said, not wanting her to learn Dr. Yoshida's name.

"I could not stop Miss Liu in time to prevent another public outburst," Chie said, "so I decided that I would convince her that I shared her dislike for people she thought were friends of one of the policemen. As I said,

I needed her trust until I was ready."

"You spoke of removing the evidence," Inspector Ueki said. "May I ask what kind?"

Chie Sunada stood up and waved the revolver in the direction of some propane gas tanks against the wall. "When the Green Jade Palace is destroyed by one of those tragic accidents that happen from time to time, who can make accusations against me or my husband? You? Sam Brent? Miss Liu? You people *are* the evidence! All that is left for me to do is to open a gas valve. The lighted candles will take care of the rest after I am safely gone."

"The other people who work here," I said desperately. "Where are they? They will surely tell..."

Chie moistened her lips. "Before you arrived, I treated them to an afternoon drink. They are sleeping in their garret quarters—which is where the bodies will be found."

I could think of many reasons why she wouldn't get away with it, but Chie Sunada would wait no longer. "Drink!" she said. "I would prefer not to have you discovered with bullet holes, but, then again, the fire might take care of minor details like that. I give you the choice."

Dragging it out as long as possible, I lifted the glass,

watched the inspector do the same. Miss Liu was paralyzed by fear; and Chie ordered me to force her to swallow the potion. I couldn't, held the young woman tightly, braced, awaited the brief roar and flash of red. Red like... the center-parted hair on the head poking up from the staircase.

"Aphrodite!" I shouted, then felt a pang of intense remorse for bringing an innocent animal to slaughter.

Part of Aphrodite's vexation, in retrospect, may have been due to her being left in the car so long. Grapes consumed, she must have fidgeted for a while; then discovered that handles on unlocked car doors can be pulled, with interesting consequences. She'd seen us go through the doors of the Green Jade Palace, and in her orangutan way, I suppose she reasoned that she could, too. There were voices, some familiar, coming from upstairs, and, a natural climber, she came up to see what was going on.

What she saw undoubtedly added to her irritation: a two-legged being holding one of those things that made such a frightening noise. Now, Chie Sunada had never seen an ape of any kind (much less one with red hair), and the ape had no way of knowing that what the

woman held in her hand was not the same thing as the piece of plastic she had stomped earlier.

Subsequently, when Aphrodite reenacted the scuttling, sideways, crab doodle waltz to the accompaniment of several loud hoots, Chie Sunada hurried to aim the gun at the hairy monster, caught a foot on a rubber fuel line snaking across the room from a propane tank, and went smashing into the railing at the top of the steep stairwell, dropping the weapon.

Chie Sunada teetered and tottered, mouth agape, and started to go over backwards. Aphrodite, whether by humane intent or otherwise, grabbed one ankle and Ueki (who had shot to his feet during the distraction) took a firm hold on the other.

"Get me up! Get me up!" the cabaret owner pleaded in tones now devoid of malice.

"Gladly," Ueki said, "but first, if you please, I want the names of all the people who referred illegal aliens to you, how many others you know about in Okayama, and if your husband has corrupted anyone else at City Hall."

"I will never tell!" she said. "You would not let me fall to my death!"

Aphrodite, seemingly bored, released the ankle she was gripping and came over to me.

"All that is saving you now," Ueki said, "is one of my hands, and I am thinking of taking out my notebook to record your refusal to give information."

Mrs. Sunada, upside down, named names.

Ueki hauled her to safety and took out an opened pack of cigarettes. "Sam," he said, "I have been sneaking these around since yesterday. Will you forgive me if I violate my vow and have one small cigarette?"

"After what we just went through," I grinned, "I don't care if you smoke a whole carton."

Ueki went to a telephone to call headquarters, and while we waited with Miss Liu for his men to pick up the prisoner and revive the sleeping beauties, Aphrodite started nosing around the cubicles on the second floor.

A renewed bout of hooting and wild dancing led us to the last of the missing guns.

Inspector Ueki and I arrived at Okayama Airport before sunrise on a clear winter morning. Passing by the ticket counters and security gates, we headed for the coffee shop and put in our orders.

Beyond the gray runways, the sky was a light pink above the mountains, and the temperature promised to be mild.

"Hate to see them go," I said,

"but Yoshida must be in seventh heaven."

Ueki spooned sugar into his coffee. "He has everything a man could want, Sam—money for his orangutan rescue efforts, funding to expand the primate center, and a new bride who adores him."

"Yeah, amazing how things work out, isn't it?" I didn't regard my comment as trite. The fund-raising television show had turned out better than anyone expected. The master of ceremonies almost spoiled it with a lot of hype about Aphrodite's part in saving us from Chie Sunada's clutches, but the red-haired orangutan won the day for Dr. Yoshida's cause by being her unpretentious self.

All she did was sit on my lap, finger in mouth, gazing into the TV cameras with her look of exceeding innocence. It meant more than the speeches Ueki and I spent so much time polishing and rehearsing, and after the lights were down the telephones began ringing in a deluge of pledges.

I thought it fitting that Dr. Yoshida's victory came on the heels of one that went to Inspector Ueki. The arrest of Chie and Naoyuki Sunada for forging government documents and harboring illegal aliens was followed by a crackdown on other nightclub and cabaret owners in Okayama and elsewhere who

were forcing young women to work for almost nothing. Chie Sunada also faced charges of attempted murder, and Hirata and Iwakiri were fired for their transgressions.

I did feel sorry for the people who were packed off to their native lands in the aftermath, but for some of them it was a far sight better than losing their lives to further Chie Sunada's dreams for continued criminal exploitation.

"No dangling loose ends in this case, were there, Toshihiko?" I said, breaking away from my recollections.

"Only two of a trivial nature," he laughed, taking out a roll of mints and popping one in his mouth.

Ueki was off cigarettes, but now had a candy habit. And my closets were not completely cleaned. Noriko and the inspector had agreed that I could keep my small treasures because at least one of them had proved useful—the toy gun that led Aphrodite to eliminate the danger of a real one in Chie Sunada's hand. I did, however, give up acquiring new items.

Savoring the rich coffee, I felt the touch of a soft hand on my shoulder. As before, it was attached to a lovely, long-haired woman, but now Miss Hummingbirds—Mrs. Hummingbirds Yoshida—gave me an affectionate kiss instead of a

landing on the floor in a toppled chair.

"I happy to see you both," she said, moving over to buss the inspector.

"Happy, yes. I think so," said Kensaku Yoshida. "And so is Aphrodite. Yes, she is."

Aphrodite ambled away from Yoshida and got up in my lap, grapes and all, while the rest of us discussed the upcoming voyage. First the Yoshidas would go to Borneo, then Sumatra, honeymooning as they worked out the details for shipping orangutans to a new home. Aphrodite would stay at my house until they returned.

Yoshida's eyes seldom left his wife, and I didn't blame him. Theirs was much more than a May-December match. From the time they met while Miss Liu was recovering at our home from her ordeal, they added to each other. She made Yoshida look and act a decade younger, and he brought out a serious, thoughtful side to her nature. And both of them shared a love for Aphrodite.

In possession of legal papers to work in Japan, Hummingbirds had not faced summary deportation, although that was imminent because her sponsor, Chie Sunada, was no longer in

business. But no one, from Okayama City Hall to the ministries of Tokyo, found any objections to Hummingbirds' staying on a permanent basis as Mrs. Kensaku Yoshida.

The wall-mounted speakers announced the departure of their flight, and we went through security to wave them off from outside (with Aphrodite receiving her usual number of smiles from guards and passengers alike).

"You take good care Aphrodite," Hummingbirds said tearfully.

"Come, wife," Yoshida said comfortingly. "Aphrodite is with friends. Yes, she is."

Aphrodite hugged me tightly as the plane's roaring propellers took it down the runway, then up to the cloudless sky.

"Don't worry, gal," I said. "They're off to do some good in the world, and that's the best anyone can ask. Wish them luck!"

Inspector Ueki began to laugh. "Incredible! Did you see what she did with her hand?"

"No. What?"

Ueki made the thumbs-up sign. "Can you believe that, Sam?"

I believed it.

Yes, I did.

UNSOLVED

by Hubert Phillips ("Caliban")

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the November issue.

In the village of Tellham Nuthen everyone's surname is either Washington or Longbow. The Washingtons always tell the truth, the Longbows always tell lies.

Meeting a group of four villagers in the street, I put my customary inquiries as to whether they were Longbows or Washingtons. The first villager replied: "We are all Longbows." The second: "Only one of us is a Longbow." The third: "No; two of us are Longbows." The fourth: "I'm a Washington."

Now, a villager who says "I'm a Washington" may clearly be either a Washington or a Longbow.

Was the fourth speaker a Washington?

See page 149 for the solution to the September puzzle.

"I'm a Washington," taken from My Best Puzzles in Logic & Reasoning by Hubert Phillips ("Caliban").
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The Moosetrap

by Charles Peterson



“Hold still!” says Knuckles McCloskey who, I notice with some dismay, has a .38 pistol pointed my way. Then he adds, “There is a cockroach on the wall behind you.”

Blam! goes the .38. I try not to wince as the bullet zaps past my ear, and turn to see a blot on the wall where there was none before.

“Missed!” says Knuckles, scowling.

“What do you mean? You got

him, didn’t you?”

“Yeah,” says Knuckles, morosely, “but I was aiming for the eyes. Oh well, back to business: I want you should steal a moose for me.”

“A what?”

“Read my lips. Moose. Em—oh—oh—ess. I want you should steal one. Not a whole one,” he amends. “Just one end. The front end. I figure if there’s anybody who can do it, it must be Kit the Cat Burglar.”

Such is fame, I guess. Today,

you understand, I am plain citizen Augie Augenblick, having spent some time squaring myself with society, but at the time of which I write, I am known as Kit the Cat Burglar, just as Knuckles McCloskey is known as The-Boss-And-Don't-You-Forget-It. And not long before the time of which I write, Knuckles induces me to try to teach his son Lochinvar some of the finer points of cat burgling. Though only partially successful, my efforts evidently impress Knuckles because here I am again, following an invitation delivered personally by two of his goons. I am trying to look calm, although inwardly I am trembling to the point where I can feel my blood frothing. He has this effect on people. There are some who claim, no doubt due to a craggy assortment of features that appear to have been sculpted with a jackhammer, that he was not so much born as quarried.

I venture a cautious query. "Do you have a particular moose in mind, or will any miscellaneous moose do?"

"Ever hear of the Restful Vista Massacre?" he says in reply.

It seems (according to Knuckles) that back in the thirties a Chicago mobster named Louie the Lunchbox—because he goes around collecting protection money in a tin lunch-

box—finds this lunchbox snatched by a rival gangster named Spiffy Daggett, who gathers a few close friends and quickly leaves town. Since the lunchbox contains some hundred thousand dollars, this does not sit well with Louie, who calls on a few of his friends and trails Spiffy to a northern Wisconsin resort called Restful Vista. Hostilities break out, and by the time the lead stops flying and a squad of G-men swoops in, the atmosphere is very restful indeed, and all that remains is to ask the local undertaker if he offers quantity discounts. But of Louie's hundred thousand there is no trace.

"There is a rehash of this incident in last week's Sunday magazine," Knuckles continues, "from which I learn that the old bird who owned the joint turned it into a tourist trap. Kept it just as it was after the shootout. And the story goes on to say that the aforementioned old bird has now died, and that the famous shootout scene is scheduled to be torn down next week. There is this picture of the barroom where all the action was."

He spreads the paper before me, then produces another, yellow and brittle with age. "And here is a picture of the same room taken right after the shootout. Those feet over there," he adds, with a touch of pride,

"are my Uncle Spike's. Notice anything?"

"His feet are still there?" I think this is carrying historical accuracy a bit far.

"That's a dummy, you dummy!" roars Knuckles. "Like the one against the wall that's supposed to be Spiffy Daggett. Look again!"

I study some more, and the only thing I notice is that the real Spiffy in the old photograph has his arm extended in a rather odd way. In fact, he appears to be pointing upward toward the moosehead on the wall above, opposite the bar.

Knuckles grunts in satisfaction. "You see? I think maybe Spiffy was trying to leave a message—and I am very curious to have a look inside that moose."

"And that's where I come in?"

"Right. You want to get there before the wrecking crews."

"You mean this weekend?"

Knuckles nods as he folds up his newspaper. "One more thing," he remarks. "A minor complication, really. It seems the J. Edgar Hoover Post 47 of the FBI Veterans heard that the place was going to be torn down. So they're having a reunion up there this weekend. The place will be crawling with ex-G-men. Hope you won't find them troublesome."

What could be less troublesome than trying to steal a

moosehead under the noses of a posse of G-men? Nothing, I suppose, except maybe arguing the matter with a person who has a long history of not losing arguments. Even with cockroaches.

The following day finds me in the lobby of the Restful Vista lodge, awaiting the attention of F. Powell, Mgr., and feeling increasingly ill at ease. Northern Wisconsin induces sensations of nervousness. For one thing, it is too green, too full of trees, too quiet. For another, the lobby is dark and musty and hung with selected portions of deer, bear, raccoons, weasels, fish, and other assorted fauna, all gazing at me with accusing expressions as if they know perfectly well what I am up to and, furthermore, are going to tell somebody as soon as the opportunity arises. For a third, there is a moosehead over the fireplace—some relative, I presume, of the one I am supposed to purloin from the barroom—that wears a demented look like that of a moose who has been dipping not wisely but too well into the locoweed. And it is huge—I mean, like *big*! For the first time it occurs to me that I may have trouble tucking a moosehead under my coat and scampering into the night—unless I bring along a derrick.

I am roused from this doleful review by a feminine voice asking if it can be of help and I turn, bringing into focus a dish with short blonde hair sweeping low across her forehead, long eyelashes framing amethyst eyes, and a figure that curves hither and thither in all the right places.

"Urg!" I gurgle, momentarily bereft of speech.

"Pardon?"

"I mean, I am looking for F. Powell, Mgr.," I say, when the larynx is back in gear.

"Correction. You are looking at F. Powell, Mgr., the F standing for Frederica. Unless you are one of the directors of the Pipsissewa Falls State Bank, in which case the F stands for Foolish Female."

"Come again?"

F. Powell, Mgr., gives herself a little shake. "Sorry. I shouldn't dump my problems on you. It's just that I've been trying for months to get the bank to see the possibilities of this place—with a bit of capital investment. But they're as bad as Uncle Roscoe (from whom I inherited this establishment) when it comes to seeing beyond their noses."

"What should they be seeing?"

"Well, a year-round resort, for instance. Notice those hills back of the lodge? Can't you picture them laced with ski trails and dotted with skiers

trickling to and fro in their colorful native costumes?"

"And their quaint full-leg casts? Now that you mention it—"

"I have. Time and again. But the bank says that the Restful Vista is a summer resort, and it is well known that summer resorts do not operate in the winter. Sometimes I could throw back my head and howl like a banshee."

I must look alarmed, for she suddenly recalls herself to the matter at hand, and very shortly I find myself in a small second floor room that appears to have been last redecorated back in 1909. It is, I am told, all that remains available, the rest having been allotted to the ex-G-men attending their reunion.

Naturally, I am not anxious to cross paths with these birds, on general principles, but, lacking any means of remote-controlled moosenapping, I have to leave to reconnoiter the barroom. Happily, I discover it is too early for the tourist crowd, and the only inhabitant is F. Powell, tidying up.

At first glance, it appears that tidying up is what the place needs a lot of, until one realizes that the apparent chaos is actually Historical Preservation. The bullet holes in the backbar mirror, for example, and others peppering the walls, are the genuine article, left

over from the gunfight. The windows, too, are generously perforated, the old panes carefully preserved between new ones. Some mannequins representing members of the Spiffy Daggett bunch are draped lifelessly here and there, including the one of Spiffy himself lying beneath the moosehead. Unlike the maniacal moose in the lobby, this one wears a rather benign look, as though gazing down at the carnage and reflecting that boys will be boys.

Frederica presses a little brochure into my hand. "You can't tell the corpses without a scorecard," she says. "This is it: a bang-by-bang account of the Restful Vista Massacre. Uncle Roscoe," she adds, "used to go around touching up the bloodstains with red stamp-pad ink, but I've sort of let that slide."

I nod understandingly. "A bit too garish for contemporary taste, I imagine?"

"Faugh!" snorts a third voice, thereby becoming the first person I ever met who actually said, "Faugh!" to anything, and we turn to find our duet has become a trio with the addition of a tall, thin bimbo with wavy iron-grey hair, a neatly-trimmed mustache of like hue, and eyes of a peculiarly piercing quality. "This sort of squeamishness is responsible for today's miserable crime rate," he says. "Back in the old days we had no qualms

about spreading a bit of blood around. Kept the crooks on their toes. Name's Mervin Purkiss," he goes on, extending a mitt. "Formerly San Francisco office, FBI."

"Ernie Jones," I reply, that being the name I signed in the hotel register. "Just visiting."

"I've seen you someplace before," says Purkiss, sharpening that piercing eye into a stare that penetrates to and rattles one's vertebrae like castanets. "I never forget a face. 'Photographic Memory Purkiss' they used to call me. Remember 'Pretty Boy' Miskiwick? Had so much plastic surgery his face used to squeak when he smiled. But I nabbed him three minutes after setting eyes on him. Where you from, Jones? Never mind—it'll come to me. In point of fact, I was looking for you, young lady," he continues, turning to Frederica, and goes into a discussion about the banquet that night which, I gather, is to be enlightened by the presence of the Pipsissewa County sheriff, speaking on "Law Enforcement and the Transient Public."

While this is going on, I am slithering about the barroom, ostensibly following the shoot-out scenario in the brochure, but really sneaking peeks at the moose with the moola. I am somewhat encouraged to see that it is only about two-thirds

the size of the one in the lobby, so if it is only stuffed with hundred dollar bills it should be easier to manage. There are three bolts holding its wooden plaque to the wall, and nearby is a sturdy-looking table suitable for climbing on. And if everybody is going to be whooping it up at the reunion banquet in the dining room, the coast may well be clear for my business.

It is a comforting thought anyway, and as one of the few to come my way since my audience with Knuckles McCloskey, I ponder it gratefully throughout the afternoon. Pondering is about all I can do, for although there is a library at the Restful Vista, its contents run to the complete works of Gene Stratton-Porter, General Lew Wallace, and William Jennings Bryan. There are canoes to paddle and fishing tackle to borrow, but the former I am happy to leave to Hiawatha, and the latter to whoever finds fish fascinating elsewhere than on a platter with lemon and parsley. From time to time I spy Frederica scurrying about, a curl flopping attractively over one eye, as she seems to be trying to be two or three people at once.

"Slow down, young Freddie," I hail her at one point. "You'll go up in a puff of smoke any minute."

She gives me a rueful grin, blows the curl off her forehead and sits down on the rustic bench beside me. "I know—but that's life in the summer resort lane. They have a saying: you can't make a buck unless you also make the beds. And this is the fullest we've been all season. Goodness knows how it'll be when we don't have the bar-room to pull in the tourists. It's coming down next week, you know."

"I heard. How come?"

"Condemned," says Frederica, succinctly. "And there's not enough in the old sock to bring it up to standard. The whole darned place is quivering on the edge of desuetude. So," she says, rising, "here goes Frederica to the rescue, again. Have you been for a swim, Mr. Jones?"

"Ernie, please. No, not yet."

"Give it a try; the water's fine." She gives me a dazzling smile that somehow seems to linger, like the Cheshire Cat's, for several moments after she vanishes at the gallop. I look at the water, which may be fine but looks to me as though it harbors any number of creatures that are likely to bite, and decide to return to my room for a nap, in preparation for the night's work. My complacent mood has been sullied by the harassed expression in Frederica's eyes, for I am a person who likes to see people happy — es-

pecially when they are pretty blonde females with amethyst eyes and smiles that light up the place like sparklers on a birthday cake. And my mood deteriorates even more when I encounter Mervin Purkiss en route.

"Ah, there, Mr.—ah—Jones," he says, smiling archly on the "Jones." "I haven't placed you yet, but give me time. You're quite a challenge, really. Quite a challenge!"

He strolls on, humming softly, leaving me to do a fast review of any posters I may have appeared on. Oddly enough, I can't recall any.

I try to phone Knuckles McCloskey with a report, but his phone-answering goon says he is out. So I wait. And wait. It doesn't get dark until late, up here in the north, so it is getting on toward midnight before I judge that the time is ripe. The barroom door is locked, but presents no real problem, and the little noise I make is more than covered by that of the reunion, which is still whooping it up in the dining room.

One of the things you develop in my line of work is a sort of extra-sensory perception of extraneous personnel in the area, and it seems to me that said ESP is tingling mildly as I edge into the barroom. However, I

can find no reason for this so proceed to business, sliding the previously-noted table under the moose, being careful not to disturb Spiffy Daggett, hopping up thereon, and tackling the previously-noted bolts while resting the moosehead on my shoulder so it shouldn't crash to the floor and scare anybody, notably me. I ease the moose off the wall—it is not as heavy as I expect—and lay it on the table.

Then my heart leaps into my throat and starts rattling my back teeth as a voice murmurs: "Neat job, Kit! Couldn'ta done better myself!" and a flicker of light from a carefully masked flashlight reveals a familiar shape emerging from behind the bar.

"Knuckles McCloskey! Wh—what are you doing here?" I demand, as soon as the heart is back in position and my nerves have quit humming.

"Well, now," says Knuckles, smoothly, "it came to me after I sent you up here that it was unfair to expose you to temptation. I mean, who knows what thoughts might come to you as you find Lunchbox Louie's hundred grand tickling your fingertips inside that thing?"

"You thought I'd pocket the dough and blow?"

"Wouldn't anybody?" says Knuckles, thereby demolishing that old adage about honor

among thieves. "So I figured I'd follow you and save you from yourself. The moose, please!"

"Help yourself."

Knuckles examines the moosehead briefly, then there is a rending noise as he wrenches the head from its shield-like wooden base and peers into the cavity. "There's something in there," he exults. "Here—hold the light!"

He reaches in and says, "It feels like paper money!" Then his expression changes as he tries to withdraw his arm. "Blast! My sleeve is caught on something!"

"Pull!" I say.

"And tear this cashmere jacket?"

"Try jiggling it free."

Knuckles jiggles, to no avail. Meanwhile, I am suddenly aware of voices approaching, and presently Knuckles hears them, too. "Get me out of here!" he rasps; but I have already faded into the background and exited from a side window—a feat Knuckles finds difficult to emulate with his arm in a moose. Thus, when half a dozen ex-feds come barging in, switching on lights and babbling about one last look at the scene, they discover an addition to the cast of characters.

"What are you doing with that moose?" thunders a voice I later find is that of Sheriff Swackhammer.

"What moose?" says Knuckles.

I wait to hear no more, but hurry back to my room—not an easy thing to do unobserved, when the lobby is seething with lawmen pouring out of the dining room, but a cat burglar has ways of getting into second story windows that are denied other folks, and en route I am desperately trying to think of some way of getting Knuckles out of this. Otherwise, I have the feeling that it's all going to turn out to be my fault—and it's not particularly healthy to be on the receiving end of Knuckles McCloskey's scowls.

It is less than ten minutes later when I descend into the lobby again to find McCloskey the center of attention in a large group of former G-men with Sheriff Swackhammer urging him to come clean. At least Knuckles has divested himself of the moose, though not without severe damage to his jacket sleeve, and is loudly maintaining that he's not talking without his lawyer.

"Why, Mr. McCloskey!" I cry. "What are you doing here?"

All eyes turn to me—including McCloskey's, shooting fire, and the sheriff's, squinting suspiciously. I manage to tip Knuckles a wink as the sheriff says, "You know this bird?"

"Of course," I reply. "This is Humbert T. McCloskey, the famous crime collector of Hamtramck, Michigan."

"Oh, yeah?" says the sheriff. "What's he doing with his mitt in a moose?"

"Obviously he was looking for a memento of the Restful Vista Massacre for his collection, and got carried away, as collectors will. Tch-tch, Mr. McCloskey; naughty, naughty! I'm sure that he'll be pleased to offer to buy the moose from Miss Powell. Would five hundred be enough?" I add, turning to Freddie, who is hovering nearby, wide-eyed.

"And just who are you?" the sheriff growls.

"Allow me," intervenes Mervin Purkiss, stepping forward and licking his lips, which are curved in a knowing smirk.

Curses! I say to myself, or words to that effect. *And just when I thought it was in the bag.*

"This young man has been concealing his identity—and with good reason," says Purkiss.

"Concealed identity?" Sheriff Swackhammer's eyebrows knit into a frown almost as frightening as McCloskey's.

"Oh, yes. Evidently he didn't want to upstage our little get-together—as he would have, had everyone known that, far from being plain Ernie Jones..."

I catch McCloskey's eye and give a little shrug that says, *I tried.*

"... he is really Renfrew Gibbons, the assistant district attorney of San Diego responsible for putting the infamous Parfrey gang behind bars!"

There are gasps and a patter of applause, and Purkiss gives me a dig in the ribs, muttering, "Young scalawag! Didn't reckon with 'Photographic Memory' Purkiss, did you?"

If anything, the North Woods is even quieter than usual when I come down for a late breakfast the following morning—late because I have been waiting for Purkiss and his pals to check out. Knuckles, of course, has departed the previous evening, along with his ravaged moosehead and minus five C-notes which he has turned over to Freddie with the air of one who has got off cheap. The lobby is deserted except for Freddie at the checkout desk, scanning the morning paper.

"Hi!" she greets me. "Did you finally sleep off last night's excitement? How lucky for Mr. McCloskey that you could identify him, and how lucky for me that you convinced him to buy that moosehead—although he didn't seem too thrilled to find it stuffed with old bits of the Pipsissewa Falls Gazette and *Intelligencer*. And you know

what?" she goes on, brightening, "he really started something. All those old FBI men decided they wanted souvenirs, too. I have orders for two thousand dollars' worth of old barroom furniture—all because of dear Mr. McCloskey!"

She sighs happily, then gives a little chuckle.

"What's so funny?"

"Mr. McCloskey going to all that trouble over that moosehead," says Freddie, "when it isn't even the real McCoy. That—" she says, pointing to the depraved-looking specimen leering at us from the mantel—"is the one that originally hung in the bar. Uncle Roscoe moved it because it made the tourists laugh, and he didn't think it added the right touch to the mood of the place. Do you think I should write Mr. McCloskey and tell him?"

It is some time before I can respond, as the moose seems to be doing some sort of Latin American dancestep before my eyes.

"If I know Mr. McCloskey," I say at last, "he'd be lots happier not knowing. And if I were you, I'd let sleeping mooses—meese—mice—lie!"

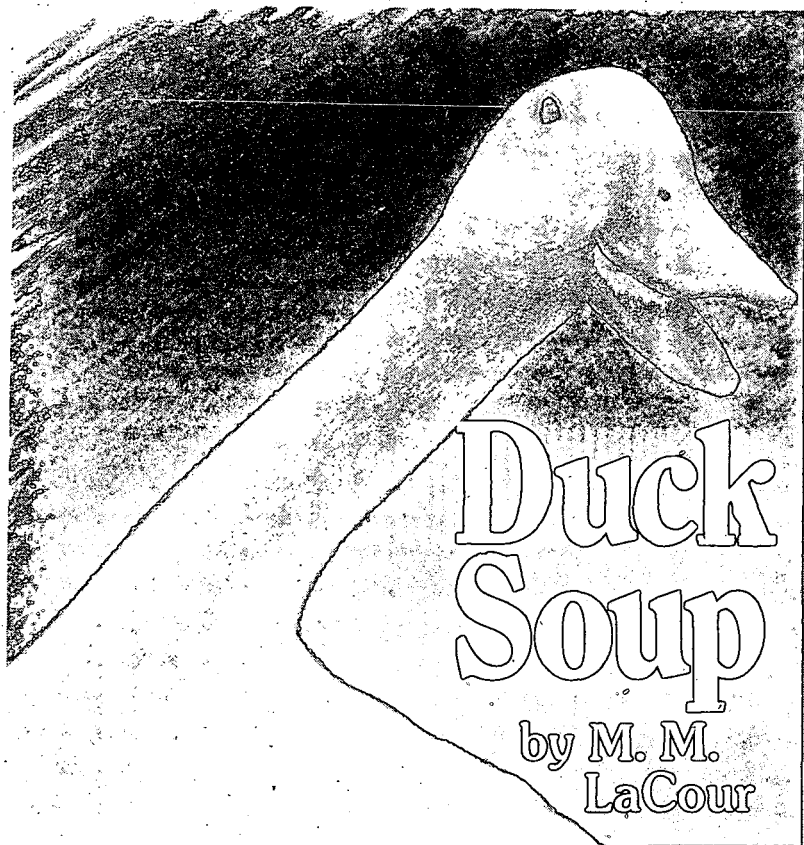
What with one thing and another, it is three or four weeks before I find myself back in

McCloskeyland and in the presence of the Boss himself, who has called me in to express his thanks for getting him out of Sheriff Swackhammer's clutches. For which, he says, if I ever need a favor like having a rival cat burglar expunged, all I need do is ask.

"Did you hear the latest from that hell-hole up in Pipsissewa Falls?" he asks. "The hundred grand turned up after all! That blonde popsy found it when they tore down the barroom—except it turned out to be only ninety grand. Too bad you missed out, Kit—I was gonna cut you in for a couple of big ones."

He dismisses me with a wave, and the suggestion that, should the situation arise again, he would appreciate my choosing a name other than Humbert. I am grateful that he doesn't think to query me further about events at the Restful Vista, for such are his powers of persuasion that I might end up telling him how I get the hundred grand out of the moose in the lobby and plant it in the barroom, and steer Freddie into finding it so she can build her ski runs and work herself to death all winter as well as all summer.

Seems to me all that is worth a ten per cent finder's fee. Right?



“My God, Elly, how many of those creatures are you feeding now?” I counted at least twenty-five ducks flapping and quacking away, demanding their daily benefits in the animal welfare state my dear wife maintained on the river bank in our front yard.

Illustration by Barbara Roman

“And where did those three huge white ones come from?” All this had to be costing us a fortune.

“Well, dear, I really haven’t stopped to count them,” answered Elly as she continued to ladle huge scoopfuls of cracked corn into her feeding bucket. “Not that many, Hec, it just

seems like a lot."

"The white ones would be perfect for duck soup."

Ignoring that remark, she headed out of the house, down toward the bank and her flock. "You know you'll have twice as many next year if you keep this up!" I shouted.

I called it her flock, but actually they were all wild mallards, except for the three new ones. I wondered where they had come from.

I went to the picture window and watched her scatter the corn. A storm was brewing, I could smell it in the air. And huge dark-edged clouds were approaching the west face of Mount Si. It was going to be a nice evening to curl up by the fireplace with a book.

I smiled: the retirement biz wasn't that hard to take.

Tom, our sheriff, told me the next day about little Katherine—how myopic her vision was and about the huge Coke-bottle lenses the poor kid had to wear. But she hadn't let her extreme near-sightedness stop her from doing all the things other not so handicapped five-year-olds did.

One of Katherine's favorite adventures was to go down to the creek where it joined the South Fork of the Snoqualmie River, not far from our house,

and peer at its silty bed looking for what she called walking sticks. Tom further explained, in more detail than I cared to hear at the time, that what she called a walking stick was actually an insect, whose name I've already forgotten, that makes a protective body-covering out of sticks or rocks.

For Katherine, who couldn't see the tiny little legs scurrying below their shells, they were merely walking sticks. They alone usually kept the child entranced long enough for her mother to take a breather, and sit back and enjoy the mountain scenery.

But that morning a most peculiarly shaped rock caught Katherine's fancy, and she called her mother over to share what, through her hazy vision of the world, she thought to be a rock shaped like a hand.

I think that about the same time Katherine's mother was hysterically calling Tom, I was knee deep in soggy wet leaves, cursing the previous night's rainstorm.

"Don't you feel well, dear?" asked Elly from the other side of the yard, where she was pulling up daffodil bulbs.

"And what makes you ask that?" I retorted, giving a recalcitrant leaf a vicious swipe with the rake. The night winds

had brought down even more leaves than usual. Daug wasn't helping matters, either. I had given in to a foolish whim and bought a German shepherd puppy six months earlier. It had seemed like a good idea at the time. At that moment, though, he was doing his part to increase my irritation by leaping head first into my piles of leaves.

In six short months, what had begun life as a sweet, cuddly little ball of fur had turned into seventy pounds of pure energy. I had wanted to call him "Dog"; Elly preferred a real name; in the end we compromised with "Daug."

"Your dog is headed for the pound!"

"So now it's my dog?" quipped Elly. She stopped digging and looked our way. "When he learned how to roll over yesterday, he was your dog. Whose dog is he, may I ask, when it's time to open dogfood cans?"

"Why, yours, of course."

"Seriously, Hec, are you all right? You've been unusually grumpy all morning."

I walked over to the base of the maple where she had her bulb bed. Daug could have the leaves.

"Oh, I'm all right, Elly. I just didn't sleep well last night." I looked out over the river. Dark clouds were still hovering

around, and the sun was nowhere in sight.

"First there was the rain and the wind, and then there was that damn dog down the street, barking and howling."

"That *was* rather strange, wasn't it?" Eloise put down her spade and clapped for Daug. "The loud barking, then that long howl." She shivered involuntarily. "It was eerie. You know, they say a howling dog is a sign of death."

"Do you know whose dog it was?"

She shook her head.

Not being accustomed to restless nights, I found not having my full eight hours a disagreeable experience. It wasn't just that I felt tired, but I was also sort of uneasy. I couldn't put my finger on it right then, but I felt as if something unpleasant was hanging in the air.

Elly clapped for Daug again; he had decided the ducks were too far up on his property. Only he knew where duck domain ended, and therefore it was his duty to make sure they toed the line. The mallards, used to the antics of neighborhood dogs, cats, and little boys with rocks, swam out into the pond a safe distance. The three new white ones, though, quacked and squawked in protest before finally taking to the water.

"You never did tell me where

those white ducks came from. I've noticed they don't seem to be able to fly." They were nice looking animals, much larger than those in the wild flock.

"You know the man who takes his little boy for walks on the dike every evening?" answered Elly.

"Can't say I ever noticed."

"And you're a retired chief of police! What a witness you'd make. You know them, they always bring a bag of bread-crumbs to feed the ducks."

"Oh, him." I didn't know who in the world she was talking about.

Then, as if we had literally conjured him up out of our minds, he appeared on the dike, carrying a small brown bag and calling to the ducks.

"There he is now!" marveled Elly. "He said he'd be back later this morning to feed them."

I vaguely recognized him. Seeing us, he waved casually, then went back to getting the ducks' attention.

The river, bound by a dike, runs in front of our house, and that part of the bank is not open to the public. But on one side of our property is an access road, a public easement, where anyone can come to walk along the dike. It provides us an odd mixture of isolation and contact with the rest of humankind.

It was on the public side of

the dike that the man stood, his bag of duck goodies in hand. The white ones seemed to recognize him immediately and headed posthaste toward him.

"I wonder why he doesn't have his son along?" said Elly.

"It's really not that nice a day to be out strolling, you know. Of course, he probably doesn't have a front lawn full of maple leaves to contend with." I put my arm around Elly's shoulders. "Or just maybe Mrs. Duck Feeder is at home raking the leaves for him."

"You're barking up the wrong tree there. I have plenty of other things to keep me busy this morning, thank you." She gave me a peck on the cheek. Charming woman, my Elly.

"So I gather those are his ducks, or were his ducks." The man was taking what looked like huge chunks of bread out of the bag. The greedy ducks made them disappear in a twinkling. It was clear they were domesticated, and accustomed to eating out of his hand. The wild ones stayed out on the water. Consequently, they weren't getting any bread.

"He doesn't seem to be making any effort to feed them all," I pointed out.

"I guess he only feels responsible for the ones he raised."

"He dumped those three on you, huh?"

"He didn't exactly dump them. He bought them for his son for Easter, and now they've decided to let them be free."

"Free for you to feed."

"Hec, what do you think *he's* doing?"

"Bet you a quarter it won't last."

"No way!" said Elly. "I already know it won't last."

"And how do you know that?"

"I spoke to him earlier this morning. He said he was coming by this evening to take them home."

"Why? And why feed them now if he's coming back to get them later?"

"Beats me. How about some hot tea?"

"Best idea you've had all morning." With that we went in and left the leaves, Daug, and the ducks to fend for themselves.

I had barely settled down with my cup of tea when there was a knock on the front door. Elly answered it.

"Hi, Elly, Hec." It was Tom Rhodes, Cedar Bend's youthful, but very good, sheriff.

Tom was always a welcome visitor. In the two years since we'd moved from Chicago to the state of Washington, he'd become more and more of a needed, newfound friend.

He was tall, a full six three,

wiry looking but tough as nails. He was in uniform. "Can't stay," he said. "Just came to see if you wanted to go for a ride with me, Hec. I'm off to see a neighbor of yours."

"On business?" My interest was piqued.

"Murder," he said.

Elly gasped.

"What?" I asked incredulously. "Here, in our development?" I don't know why the thought of murder in our backyard threw me for such a loop. I wasn't a stranger to crime, twenty-five years on the Chicago police force had seen to that. But not there, not in my nice safe retirement spot.

"Come on. I'll fill you in on the way."

I got up and grabbed a jacket.

"Okay if I steal him for a while, Elly?"

"It's okay with me, Tom. Hec could do with some excitement. Just as long as somebody rakes up all those leaves before the snow comes."

"Elly, it's not going to snow for at least two more months." I fell right into her trap.

"That's what I know!" was her punchline.

It wasn't much of a ride, just around the corner and down the road about ten houses. Tom was able to give me only the barest of outlines be-

fore we arrived at the Johnses' house. I knew that a body had been found in Beaver Creek that morning by Katherine Taylor and her mother Edith, that said body had already been identified as Tyrone Johns, that his death had been caused by a violent blow to the head, that the police were considering it murder, and that we were about to break the news to Tyrone's widow, Sally.

I realized then why Tom had been so anxious to have me along. It's always tough taking the news of death to the relatives. That is also one of the most crucial moments in the investigation of a murder. You are either bringing terrible news to the family who loved and cherished the deceased, or you are confronting the most likely suspect in the case.

"You know, I sort of had a premonition about this," I admitted to Tom as we got out of his patrol car in the Johnses' driveway.

"Not the first time you ever had a hunch about something, is it?"

"Of course not, but I've never before had one based on a howling dog in the middle of the night."

"See what you mean."

We headed for the front door. All the houses in our development are modest, save a few

luxury models, but most are well kept. A few, like the Johnses', aren't. Something about the condition of the grass, the odds and ends lying around the yard, the lack of general care, all cried out *renters*.

Tom sighed, squared his shoulders, and knocked on the door. I had to smile to myself. How many times had I been there, in his position. More times than I cared to remember. And for the first time since my so-called retirement I was glad, glad I wasn't in his shoes. Thinking about it later, I realized what a crucial turning point that was for me, but at the time my mind was otherwise involved.

He had to knock again before a recalcitrant "Yeah, who is it?" greeted us from behind the closed door. The door was badly in need of paint and had several deep scratches on it. I wondered if the absent owner had required a big deposit.

"Police," responded Tom.

"Oh Jesus Christ!" A woman opened the door halfway. She was dressed in a dirty robe, and her hair was in curlers. "What is it this time?" she demanded.

"Mrs. Johns?" Tom inquired politely.

"What if I am?" Gracious she was not.

Was I standing on the doorstep of a house in Cedar Bend?

It was turning out to be a disillusioning morning for me in many respects. I'd been on those same steps many times in the past, but usually in a urine-smelling vestibule in a rat-infested tenement. Hadn't I left all that two thousand miles away?

"If you don't mind, could Chief Hoggs and I have a word with you, please?" Tom persisted calmly. Some chief, I thought, in faded bluejeans, work shirt, and knock-around jacket.

"Come on in if you have to." She stepped aside and we entered the dark living room.

From the rear we heard a door slam, then a child yelled, "Mom, ain't we gonna eat soon?"

"Shut up and get in here!" she yelled back.

"Mrs. Johns, maybe it would be better if your son waited in the other room."

"What's happened, Tyrone gotten into trouble again?" Sally Johns was trying to be hard, but there was real fear in her voice.

I took a quick look around the room. It was a mess. A dirty orange couch covered with newspapers, toys, and clothes stood against the rear wall. Against another wall were two worn and greasy armchairs. They too were littered with odds and ends. Its back to the picture window was an old con-

sole-model TV. It was off. The carpet was filthy.

Tom took a deep breath. "No, Mrs. Johns, your husband isn't in trouble, but I'm afraid it is bad news. Would you like to sit down?"

"He's been hurt!" she screamed. "Damn! I knew it. I've told him a thousand times he'd end up getting hurt!" Sally Johns was petite, I guessed about a hundred and twenty pounds, with what looked like blonde hair wrapped around those godawful curlers. I also guessed she was much younger than one would think. For a moment, standing there in that dark, stale living room, I felt genuine sorrow for her, and for all the other Sally Johnses like her. I'd seen too many of them. I just wanted to get out of that house, get back to my Elly, our dog, and the ducks.

"I'm afraid he's dead, Mrs. Johns."

Sally Johns let out the most earpiëcing scream I'd ever heard and collapsed on the couch. The child, a boy of about six, stood in the doorway looking at us. The scream seemed not to have affected him. Evidently Sally Johns screamed a lot.

"Johnny, get me my cigarettes!" she gasped.

The child quickly did as he was bid.

We waited patiently for her to light a cigarette and take a long hard drag. We hadn't been asked to sit down, and that was just fine with me.

"What happened?" she asked accusingly.

Professionally and clearly, Tom filled her in on what he had told me in the car. That her husband's body had been found in the creekbed, that someone yet unknown had given him a blow to the side of the head that had caused his death, and that the police believed Tyrone had received the blow somewhere else and had been dumped. They thought all of this had happened nine to ten hours ago, somewhere around three A.M. the previous night.

I wished I had checked the clock when the dog had howled.

From there on, everything else he said was also news to me.

"Mrs. Johns, do you know a Harry Oliver?" He sat down on the couch next to Sally Johns. Brave man that Tom, I wouldn't have sat on that couch for love nor money. Instead, I stood stupidly in the middle of the room, being given the onceover by a beady-eyed six-year-old.

"Oliver did it!" She grabbed at the name. "I told Tyrone he couldn't trust that bastard."

"We don't know if Oliver did it, Mrs. Johns. What we do

know is that two days ago your husband and Harry Oliver stole over two hundred thousand dollars' worth of cut diamonds from a jeweler in Seattle."

"What?"

"Are you sure it wouldn't be better if your son didn't hear this, Sally?" asked Tom a second time.

Ignoring his concern, she stubbed her cigarette out. "Who do you think you are, coming in here and saying things like this to me." Despite her outward display of toughness, I could see that she was fighting back tears. "First you tell me my Tyrone is dead, then you claim he stole something!" The tears came. "I don't know what you're trying to do!"

Tom shifted uncomfortably. God, I knew what he was going through.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Johns, but it's all true. We have Harry Oliver in custody right now, and he's told us the whole story."

"What did he say?"

"We picked him up three days ago on a lead from the Seattle police. This morning we were taking him out of the lockup to hand him over to the Seattle boys when he heard us talking about identifying your husband. When he heard the name, he fell apart."

"And Tyrone had all them diamonds for three days and

never told me nothing about it?" It was more a comment than a question. All of her outer bravado was gone now. Tears fell from her eyes. Whether they were for Tyrone or for the diamonds I didn't know.

"That's what I want to know, Sally," Tom said. "Do you mean you didn't know anything about the diamonds?"

"No."

Tom pushed, but she held tight. No, Tyrone hadn't mentioned any diamonds; no, she didn't have any idea where he might have hidden them.

Tom asked her permission to look around. I knew he had a warrant, but it wasn't necessary. Sally Johns didn't seem to care any more, her way, I guess, of dealing with whatever grief or sorrow she felt.

I hadn't said a word the whole time, but I hoped my presence had given Tom whatever moral support he had felt he needed. I could remember a lot of times when having my partner there had been enough to help me keep my sanity. How had I done it for twenty-five years? It was turning out to be a tough, hard day.

I knew Tom had a couple of men coming along soon who would give the Johnses' a thorough going over. I didn't envy them that. But still, that first

look around was very important, so I mentally put on my old detective hat.

The layout of the house was typical of many small ramblers in the area, living room to the front, a short hallway that led directly into the kitchen, the family room off the kitchen with a sliding glass door to the back yard, and the bedrooms and bath down another longer hallway to the left of the kitchen.

Sally Johns had evidently never read *Good Housekeeping*. Although I noticed a dishwasher, dirty dishes stood stacked in the kitchen sink. From the look of the various spills and spots, the counter tops and the kitchen table hadn't been wiped off in days. A not-so-clean-looking skillet sat on the stove top, a layer of encrusted grease marking the remnants of a meal.

I followed Tom through the house. But besides the general lack of cleanliness, nothing stuck out, no bag of diamonds waited innocently for us to claim it.

We went into the family room. The little boy stood by the sliding glass door. As we went out into the back yard I said, "Hi, what's your name?"

He stuck his tongue out at me. So much for being friendly with the natives.

Their lot, like ours, was long

and thin. Unlike ours, most of the trees had been cut down, leaving decaying stumps scattered around an ill-kempt stretch of almost living grass. The rear border was formed by a mass of wild raspberry bushes, common around the neighborhood. The side boundaries, though, unusual in our development, were new six foot tall cedar fences. The neighbors' defense against a stream of uncaring renters? Or, defense against the Johnses in particular? I speculated it was the latter. Litter was scattered everywhere. So much for my illusion, that slums only came packaged in tenement houses. Quarter acre lots were not immune.

On the left side of the yard, very close to the left-hand fence, stood a small collapsing shed, its door hanging on one rusty hinge. But it wasn't the shed itself that immediately caught our attention, it was the freshly dug hole next to it. We approached it cautiously, mindful of possible clues being trod thoughtlessly into the wet dirt.

"Well, well, Hector, look. What have we here?" said Tom.

"Looks like a hole to me."

"And a hole it is. Now if you were Tyrone Johns," said Tom, "and you had two hundred thousand dollars' worth of hot diamonds in your hands, no im-

mediate means of disposal, a greedy partner, and a curious wife and kid, wouldn't you think that burying the diamonds in the back yard would be a great idea?"

"No."

"I forgot to add, and you're not too bright."

"Well," I hedged, "you'd have to be pretty stupid to bury diamonds in your own back yard. Anybody could find them, your kid out here playing . . . a dog. And in the rain? You remember how it poured last night."

"From what Oliver said, our Tyrone was definitely not in the genius category."

"It does look freshly dug, and it is curious," I admitted. "Maybe I could see it if he planned to retrieve them soon. I've seen dumber, a lot dumber. And that's odd," I added. "Look at the neighbor's fence."

"Yeah, what?" asked Tom, following my gaze.

"Why would he put a gate there?" Next to the shed was a closed wooden gate fitted almost invisibly in the fence. From a distance it had looked like one continuous row of boards, but up close you could see it. Whoever had built the fence had done a good job, but why?

"That is odd," Tom agreed. "I planned to talk to them anyway." Then, looking around, "Don't see a shovel; wonder

what he dug this hole *with*?"

After talking to Sally Johns again, to tell her that more police would follow, we headed next door. Something was out of kilter, it didn't fit. The most likely suspects for bashing Tyrone's head in were his partner Harry and his wife Sally. Harry was sitting in a cell when it was done, and Sally just didn't strike me as having done it.

I didn't like the whole thing. Mainly, I didn't like a murder's being committed in my nice safe retirement spot. I thought we had escaped. Escaped not just crime, but people like the Johnses and the Harry Olivers.

I'd done my part, hadn't I?

Before we reached the front steps of the neighboring house, the door was unlatched by a pleasant-faced middle-aged woman. As soon as she opened the storm door, a massive German shepherd came running out of the house.

"Here, King!" she called softly. Amazingly, the dog turned and trotted back into the house. I wondered if I'd ever get Daug to behave like that.

"Come on up," she said to us. "King won't hurt you. I saw you coming." The smile on her face was warm and welcoming. That was what I was used to in Cedar Bend.

"Sorry to bother you, ma'am," said Tom. "I'm Sheriff Rhodes, and this is Police Chief Hector Hoggs. I wonder if we might ask you a few questions."

"Why, of course." She smiled at us both. "Come in. You're just in time for some coffee and cookies."

We followed her through a modest but nicely furnished living room, through the kitchen, and into the family room. Her husband and son were sitting on the couch watching a football game, chewing on freshly made chocolate chip cookies. The whole house smelled of cookies.

The layout was the same as the Johnses', but it was a different world. Middle class domesticity was still alive and well in that household. At least those were my thoughts at that moment.

"Dear," the woman said, "some policemen are here to talk to us." She was calm and polite, as if having two cops drop in for cookies and coffee was an everyday occurrence.

The man stood up and I immediately recognized him as the duck feeder. He extended his hand and said, "Gentlemen, come in, please." Then, to the little boy, "Brandon, would you turn the TV down?" And, miracle of all miracles, his son did what he was told.

"I'm John Young," the man continued. "And this is my wife Velma, and our son, Brandon."

The little boy politely said, "Hello."

John Young was taller, and older, than he had looked at the dike. I guessed that he and his wife were in their mid to late forties. Brandon, although much different in behavior, was about the same age as the Johnses' boy.

"What can we do for you?"

Mr. Young asked. "My wife was just telling us she saw you going next door." He was relaxed and cordial. "Oh, please, sit down, and have some cookies; they just came out of the oven," he added, giving his wife a smile. "Velma makes the best chocolate chip cookies in the world."

You could tell Velma Young was pleased.

Tom took the lead. "Thanks, Mr. Young, but we'll pass on the cookies if you don't mind. We won't take much of your time, just want to ask the two of you a few questions."

"Brandon, would you do Mommy and Daddy a favor and go watch the TV in your room for a while while we talk to these two gentlemen?"

"Sure, Dad," was his startling reply.

I felt as if I had been dropped feet first into the middle of a

Father Knows Best set. That family just couldn't be for real.

I went over and sat down in a recliner on the other side of the room near the sliding door that led to the back yard. This was Tom's show.

"I appreciate your cooperation," said Tom, sitting down on the couch next to John Young. Velma Young took a chair facing them.

"Is this about the Johnses?" she asked.

"Yes, it is," answered Tom. "Tell me, have you been their neighbors long?"

"Too long!" said John with a laugh.

"Now, John," chided his wife, "let's be fair."

"I am being fair. They've been living next door for over a year, and it's been one hell of a year, sergeant."

"Sheriff," corrected Tom. "Sheriff Rhodes, and this is Chief Hoggs," he added, nodding in my direction. "I gather there was some problem, Mr. Young?"

"Oh, don't get me wrong, sheriff, I don't mean you to think there was anything serious. They aren't..." he searched for the right word, "...well, let me put it this way, the Johnses weren't what you'd call ideal neighbors."

Tom waited for him to continue, but it was Velma who

carried the ball from there. "You just wouldn't believe some of the loud parties they had, sheriff. Sometimes all night! Loud music and yelling and shouting." Velma was warming to the subject. "And the fights!" She threw her hands in the air. "I've never heard such language."

What she described fitted what I'd seen of Sally Johns.

"Sheriff," John broke in, "what's happened next door?" He had a thick sandy-colored mustache that matched his hair, but heavy, dark brown eyelashes accentuated his deep-set eyes. When he spoke, he squinched up his eyes, which made his prominent eyebrows look solid across his forehead. I found it disconcerting.

"I'm afraid Mr. Johns has been found dead. Murdered."

"I see," said John Young.

That's when I knew. I don't know how, probably never will know how, but I knew. Mr. John Young; Mr. Wonderful Father, Mr. Duck Feeder, Mr. Loving Husband, had killed Tyrone Johns. There was no mystery, he had done it, pure and simple.

"I can't believe I'm hearing you say this, Hector," Tom said emphatically. "I'm not letting you get out of this car until you

admit how ridiculous what you're implying is." We were back at my house, sitting in the driveway.

"I'm not implying anything, Tom. It's a fact. John Young bashed Tyrone's head in, then dumped him in the creek." I was tired. The day was only half over and I felt as if I'd been put through a wringer. "Maybe I can't prove it, maybe it sounds like hogwash to you, but I know what I know."

"Okay, okay." Tom acquiesced with a sigh. "You know what you know. But I know what I saw and what I heard. I've never met a nicer family than those folks. I just can't picture John Young as a murderer."

"You saw the shovel just like I did."

"So what if John's toolshed is right near that gate, and so what if his shovel was spick and span. Everything in that shed was clean and neat. Don't tell me you think he put that gate in so that some rainy night he could give his neighbor a lethal whack with a shovel?"

"No, I believed his story about putting the gate in so their two boys could go back and forth to play. But I also believe he went out into his yard last night in the rain—probably his dog was out there barking at Tyrone—and when Young saw Tyrone

burying those diamonds, he went for it. You did notice all those spotlights he had mounted on the side of the house? Don't think he had any trouble seeing what Tyrone was doing, even in that storm."

Tom shook his head and laughed. "I just don't believe you, Hector. This isn't like you. I can't believe someone who spent twenty-five years as a cop could expect me to swallow such a story."

"It was that dog I heard howl last night."

"How do you know that?"

"I just know."

"And the diamonds?"

"Not far from here."

This time Tom let out a hoot.

"And I thought I knew you, Hector. Well, this takes the cake." He turned on the motor.

"Look, I'm going in to the station. I'll let you know if we come up with anything new."

"Do me one favor, will you?"

I asked, getting out of the car.

"What is it?"

"Check and see what kind of financial condition the Youngs are in."

Tom mumbled something about senility and drove off.

Elly brought me a second cup of tea, then snuggled up beside me on the couch. Outside our window it had started to rain again,

so we looked out into a dreary overcast afternoon. At least the wind wasn't blowing; my leaf piles were getting soaked, but they weren't being scattered all over. Daug, bemoaning the fates that had so cruelly decreed rain, was lying by the couch, his head down, looking woeful.

"You look awfully tired, Hec," remarked Elly. "Not getting a good night's sleep seems to have put you out of kilter."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Want to take a nap?"

I had to laugh. "Are we getting that old, Elly? Naps in the afternoon?"

"We aren't getting that old, Hec, but maybe you are!" she teased.

I was beginning to feel better already. "Do you remember Cleet Coolide, the partner I had back there for a while?"

"Sort of, maybe. Why?"

"Well, I really liked Cleet in a way. We got along pretty well for the short period we were teamed up together." That had been a long time ago, a different time, a different world. "Anyway, Cleet was a good cop in many ways. But, he had one annoying habit that used to drive me up the wall. Actually, it drove everybody up the wall."

"He called you Hec?" volunteered Elly.

"No, you silly!" God, was I lucky to have Elly. "He didn't

call me Hec. What he did do, though, was leap to conclusions." I smiled to myself, remembering Cleet. "That Cleet would see a suspect, and immediately he'd jump, either guilty or not. Claimed he could tell just from the expression on his face, or something in his voice."

"Was he usually right?"

"Strange thing about it, he often was right. Cleet had a nose all right."

"What happened to Cleet? Is he still on the force?"

"No, last time I saw him was at his going away party. Quit the force, said with a nose like his he could make a lot more money in the stock market."

"Odd how things turn out, isn't it?"

"Yep. I tell you, Elly, I've never had this happen to me before, never thought I'd be pulling a Cleet, but damn it, I know John Young is guilty."

Elly took a sip of tea and looked thoughtfully out at the river before continuing. Finally she said, "You know, Hec, I've seen Young and his son walking out on that dike, feeding the ducks, talking, and I just can't imagine his killing someone."

"Elly, you're being silly," I said, exasperated. I guess I had expected her to be on my side. "Just because someone feeds or doesn't feed the ducks doesn't

tell you anything about whether he'd kill another human being."

"They were different, Hec. The Tyrone guy who got killed, well, I know who he is, too. I had a few words with him once."

"You did?" This was news to me.

"Yep. I saw him and his son out walking a couple of times also. But do you know what they used to do?"

"What?"

"Throw rocks at the ducks. Can you imagine that, Hec? He was actually teaching his son to throw rocks at defenseless animals."

"I agree that's not too nice, but that doesn't mean he should get his head bashed in."

"I'm not too sure about that!"

Elly and her animals. "All right," I admitted. "I know it sounds farfetched. I know they presented a picture of middle class domesticity, clean house, clean living . . ."

"Besides, what in the world would make him do such a thing?"

I slipped my hand over Elly's and we fell into silence, watching the rain fall unceasingly into the river.

What had made him do it indeed? I didn't have any trouble understanding why John Young had taken that shovel to Tyrone Johns's head. It was the same kind of emotion that had

prompted him to buy three baby ducks for a pleading son on Easter. A man who thought with his heart. How many times had he instructed his son on the right thing to do, then seen his hard work wiped out by people like the Johnses. How many late night parties of loud music and dope had he been kept awake by? What had he thought about the noisy fights right next door to him? I knew he could have gone out there that night, tired of the constant irritation. I knew he could have seen Tyrone burying those diamonds and thought, why the hell not. I knew that because I knew I could have done the same thing.

And that was the worst part of that day, sitting there holding Elly's hand, knowing I had been a peace officer for twenty-five years, knowing that I could have killed a man just as easily as John Young had, given the right circumstances.

“**T**hought I'd drop back by on my way home,” explained Tom, dropping his lanky frame into my second favorite chair. I was sitting in my favorite chair, reading.

“Your timing's perfect,” said Eloise, patting him on the head. Tom was only twenty-five; some called him the child sheriff. Be-

cause of that, Elly got away with things like patting him on the head. Of course, she patted me on the head sometimes too, but that was different. “Dinner's almost ready. Can you stay, I hope?”

“Well, if you twist my arm . . .”

“Consider it twisted,” I said. “I'm glad you stopped by.”

He grinned sheepishly. “Actually, Hec, I did want to talk to you.”

“I want to hear everything,” said Elly, heading to the kitchen. “So talk loud.”

“Shoot,” I prompted.

“You know that check you wanted me to make on Young?”

“Yeah.”

“As it turns out, they are pretty deep in debt. Not a lot more than most couples, but they have a lot of credit out there.”

“I'd imagine most of his salary goes to bills?”

“I think that's probably about right,” agreed Tom. “He's an engineer, makes a good salary, but the way things cost nowadays . . .”

“Don't tell me!”

“But I still don't see that as adding up to murder.” Tom hesitated, then continued reluctantly. “There is one other thing that did come up, though.”

Elly called from the kitchen, “I can't hear you!”

"Something odd on the dead man's jacket," continued Tom in a louder voice. "A feather stuck in the fabric."

"A white one?" I suggested.

"Yep."

"You saw all those duck feathers in his back yard just like I did, Tom. Doesn't that tell you anything?"

"All right, Hec, maybe you're right. But honestly, I can't see the D.A. doing anything with a clean shovel and one lousy white duck feather. Can you?"

He was right, of course. A gut feeling, a howling dog, a clean shovel, and a duck feather didn't add up to a pile of beans in court. "Nope," I answered finally.

"And, Hector, what about the diamonds? Where the hell are they? My men've been through both houses, and nada."

"I wonder how Elly'll take to penning those ducks up for a couple of weeks?" I whispered.

"I heard that!" called Elly.

As it turned out, it took three full weeks before we recovered the diamonds, and then we recovered all but one. I think it's

in the largest of the three, lodged somewhere in the little glutton's intestine. It doesn't seem to bother him, though, and so far Elly has forestalled any and all attempts for more drastic retrieval. She claims, and rightfully so, that no one can prove it's actually there. And I think she'll prevail; after all, it's probably only worth twenty or so thousand dollars.

The Youngs have put their house up for sale, the Johnses have moved on and been replaced by three college kids, the D.A. hasn't seen fit to press charges, Harry Oliver is in jail, and the jeweler and his insurance company are happy.

As for me, the other night I had a dream in which Elly and I were out to dinner in a swanky restaurant. I ordered a huge bowl of duck soup. After the waiter brought the soup to me, I looked down into the bowl and exclaimed, "Waiter, what's this in my soup?"

"Looks like a diamond to me," he answered.

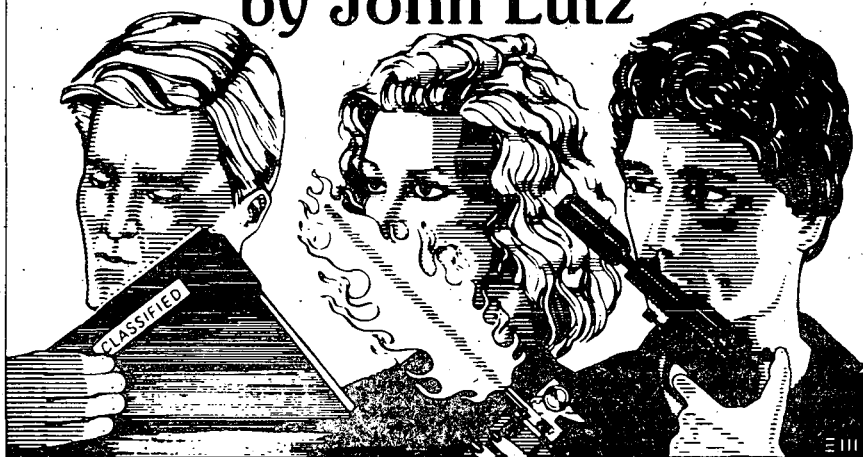
I woke up laughing my head off.

Needless to say, Elly didn't find it that funny.

FICTION

Trickle Down

by John Lutz



Endicott said, "I steal for a living." He crossed his legs, relaxed in the soft leather chair before G. David Grobner's massive, polished, cherrywood desk.

Grobner was Endicott's physical opposite. While Endicott was six feet tall, Grobner was barely over five feet. Endicott had a calm, almost lethargic air about him; Grobner was an intense hard charger who doubtless regarded himself as a visionary leader of inferior beings. But blond and handsome Endicott and swarthy and gargoyle-ugly Grobner had this in common: they were chasing the dollar. And catching it.

Illustration by Eric Marcus

"I make a profit for a living," Grobner replied to Endicott.

"Making a profit is my function as chairman of the board of Grobner Industries. I'm responsible to the people who pay my salary: the stockholders. The stockholders are the gods of the business world, Mr. Endicott. It is in the service of those gods that I've hired you."

"Are you saying that I'm a thief and you are not?" Endicott asked.

Grobner smiled a nasty smile. "Are you trying to justify either to me or to yourself what you do for a living?" he replied.

"I'm merely pointing out that I'm your agent. Nothing more."

I'm not moralizing. My justification is the same as yours."

Grobner stood up, but he was still dwarfed by his magnificent desk. His expensive dark business suit was tailored perfectly on his stocky body, but Endicott noted that his own suit was no less expensive or well tailored. Boil all the theorizing and excuses away, and he and Grobner were in the same business, the one Grobner had so simply and aptly described as "making a profit." That was, literally, the bottom line.

Endicott stood up lazily; it even seemed for a moment that he might yawn and stretch. But he smiled and said, "I have my instructions. And my money." His work wasn't the sort of thing one did by contract. Trust based on discretion played a major role in his business.

For years Endicott had toiled in the dark, anonymous foliage of the corporate jungle until he was approached by a company in competition with the one that employed him. If Endicott would only supply them with his own company's chemical formula for a new odorless pesticide, the rival company would pay him well in dollars and silence.

Endicott stole and sold the formula. And he didn't stop there. He approached the business of theft as he would any

other business. He became a professional, then he became the best of the professionals. Euphemisms such as "industrial espionage" were not for him. From the beginning he'd regarded himself, not without some perverse pride, as a thief. It was essential that one maintain a sense of reality in this business.

When an important client like Grobner Industries needed information from another company, the word would be dropped in the right places, and Endicott would hear. He didn't work cheap, but he was reliable, kept no written records, and, most important, his discretion could be relied upon. The Sphinx had nothing on Endicott when it came to keeping a secret.

He'd stolen some defense blueprints for General Armaments, and the chairman of that multinational company was a friend of G. David Grobner, to whom he had recommended Endicott. It hadn't taken Grobner long to act.

And once he'd received his commission, it didn't take Endicott long to make his own move. He'd already cased the Budman Building. It was an old twenty story structure in a run-down part of the city, near the river. Budman Enterprises, makers of industrial couplers, had no security force, and a

building as old as theirs hardly provided a challenge for someone of Endicott's expertise.

At midnight, scarcely ten hours after he'd talked to Grobner, Endicott parked his inconspicuous Ford compact in the next block, changed into his jogging shoes and dark jacket, then walked back and easily scaled the chain-link fence surrounding the Budman Building's parking lot. He noted that there were no cars in the lot—no ambitious souls working late, probably not even a night janitor.

The alarm took only five minutes to bypass. Endicott picked the lock on a side door and was inside, a shadow moving among shadows. Blood raced and pulsed in his veins. He could hear his breath hissing in the building's heavy silence. The excitement, the almost sensual exhilaration, was part of the reason he was in this business; he admitted that to himself at times like this. Disdaining the elevator, he jogged soundlessly up the stairs to the third floor. The strain in his thighs felt grand.

Grobner's directions were precise, as might be expected. Endicott moved lightly down the hall to the fourth door on the right, Brad Budman's office. Budman's name, above the word "President," was lettered on frosted glass.

The door wasn't even locked. Endicott opened it and was in a large reception room. He didn't have to use his penlight; illumination from the lights of a nearby all-night parking garage filtered through the loosely woven material of drawn drapes.

Budman's office door was locked, but that delayed Endicott only a few minutes.

There was less light in the office. Endicott took off his jacket, draped it carefully over the shade of the desk lamp, and switched on the lamp. Perfect. Now the office was dim and shadowed, and there was hardly enough light to be noticeable from outside, yet he could see well enough to work.

There was the large file cabinet in the corner, just as Grobner had said. It would be locked. The file folder containing the specifications for the advanced pneumatic coupler would be in the bottom drawer. Things were going smoothly, professionally. Endicott smiled and stepped toward the cabinet's square-cornered dark hulk.

He stopped, turned his head, and froze when the office door opened and a woman stepped inside.

The woman was tall, almost as tall as Endicott. She was long-limbed, lean-waisted, and athletic looking. Her face was oval and ghostly pale, framed

by straight dark hair parted down the middle of her scalp. Like Endicott, she wore a startled, frightened expression.

Then she noticed Endicott's dark clothing, much like her own dark jacket and jeans, and she thought about things for a moment and the alarm left her features: one night creature had recognized another. She was almost beautiful now that she wasn't afraid. "Well, a thief," she said to Endicott. "But not a dangerous one. If you had a weapon, you would have had it out by now."

"The same might be said of you," Endicott told the woman, admiring her quick and calm appraisal of the situation. "I suspect neither of us carries a weapon because we're both professionals. The term thief is one I accept; it's my occupation. As I expect it is yours."

The woman slowly shook her head, her long hair swaying. "I'm not a thief," she said. Endicott didn't like the way she said it. "My occupation is fire. I burn things down for a living." Her expression changed; the light of pure reason glittered like bright pinpoints in her dark eyes. "We might be able to work out a deal here."

"I only want a file out of that cabinet," Endicott said, not without contempt. He considered arsonists sick people. Psy-

chopaths. "Then you can set your fire and make yourself and your employer happy. An insurance fraud, no doubt."

"No doubt," the attractive arsonist said. "And you might be surprised at the names of some of my previous clients."

"And you'd be surprised at the names of *my* previous clients," Endicott said. He was fast developing a strong dislike for this firebug, though there was much about her that intrigued him.

It was as if Fate had something in mind for them.

"As a matter of fact," said the man who'd been hiding behind the file cabinet, "you have at least one previous client in common."

He was a lean, elegant man in a well-cut dark business suit. His features were regular and pleasant, and his hair was razor-groomed at precisely the right length. An Everyman with quiet class. He looked like a big company, mid-level executive, and maybe he was.

The flesh on the back of Endicott's neck began to crawl. The firebug's presence might be a coincidence, but this man's presence meant that Endicott, and probably the firebug, had been set up. And not by Fate. "Who is this client?" Endicott asked.

"General Armaments. They

have to be discreet, I'm afraid, considering what they have at stake. They owe it to their stockholders."

And Endicott realized that General Armaments, with the help of G. David Grobner, had arranged this nighttime conference.

"I have to be discreet myself," the firebug said. "So General Armaments needn't worry." There was a little-girl tremor in her voice; her heart was learning what her mind already knew. "Really! Please! I'm in business just like they are. I burn things down for a living."

"And I steal for a living," En-

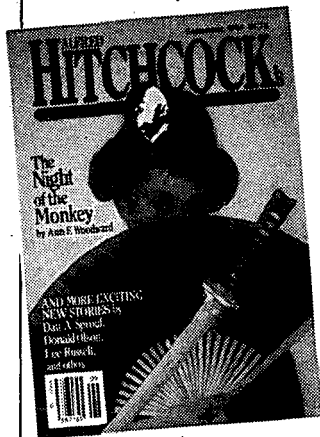
dicott said, as if to confirm what the firebug had said. But he realized it was hopeless, hopeless. What was about to happen was good business, and he knew it.

The pleasant, well-groomed man by the file cabinet had drawn a silenced automatic from beneath his pinstriped suit coat and was smiling the sort of smile that people in sales smile when the deal is closed.

"I believe both of you when you say you're discreet," he said reasonably. "I'm in business just like you two. Only I kill for a living. Because nobody's perfect."

He squeezed the trigger twice, effectively.

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MYSTERY CLASSIC

A Double-Barrelled Detective Story

by Mark Twain

(Part Two)

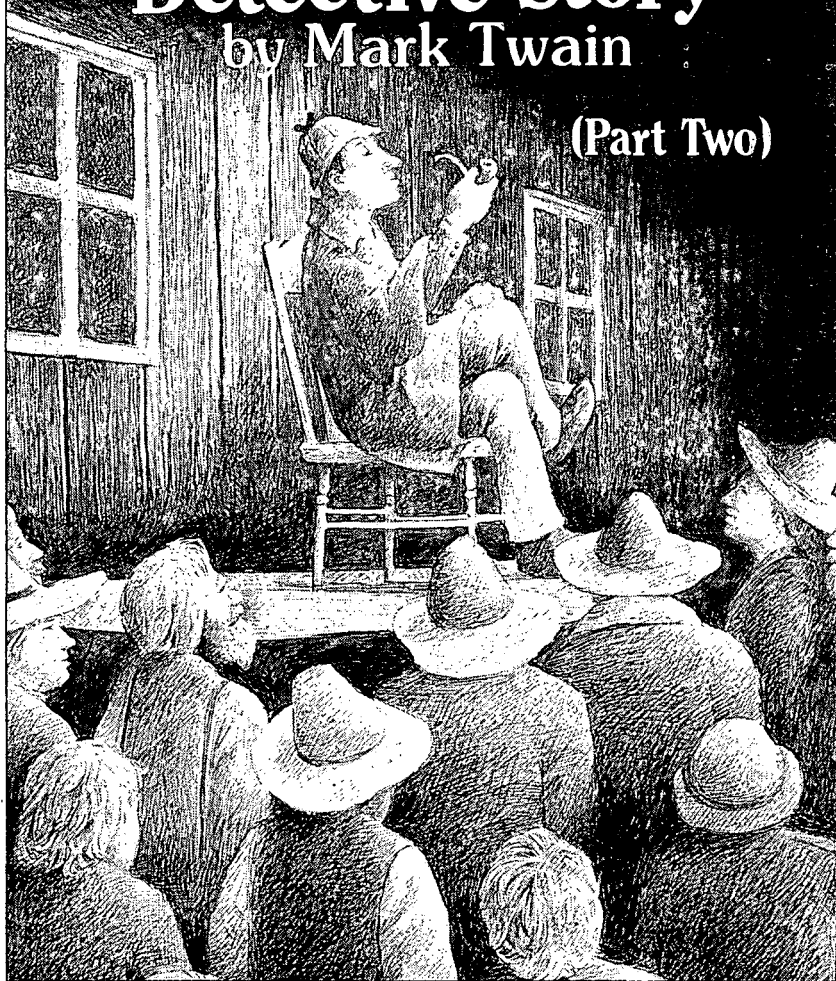


Illustration by Richard Crist

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE: In 1880, in Virginia, a young woman marries against her father's wishes. Her new husband, Jacob Fuller, is bent on avenging her father's slurs on his character and to punish the father, he humiliates the daughter. Finally, he ties her to a tree, sets his bloodhounds to tear her clothing off, leaves her to be found by passersby, and disappears. Unknown to him, she is pregnant. The father dies of a broken heart; the daughter swears revenge on Fuller. Sixteen years later, she sends her son, who goes by the name of Archy Stillman, to find his father and to ruin his life. Archy is peculiarly well suited to the scheme of revenge because of his secret ability to track people by scent, like the bloodhounds who "marked" him before birth. The boy picks up Fuller's trail in Denver, where Fuller is a successful miner and well loved by his friends. Archy drives him from the city but soon discovers that he's after the wrong man: this Jacob Fuller—now calling himself "James Walker"—is a cousin to the real villain. Desperate to make restitution, Archy follows him around the world for several years, always a step or two behind. Back in California, where he's lost the trail, Archy rests in a silver mining camp; he proves his bloodhound's nose by finding a lost child and is celebrated as a hero. Most of the miners are "good fellows," except for Flint Buckner, who's hated for his ill-treatment of his young English helper, Fetlock Jones. Jones secretly plots to murder his oppressor, and when Buckner deliberately almost kills the boy in a dynamite blast, it gives Fetlock an idea of how to solve his problems forever.

Part Two

I

The next afternoon the village was electrified with an immense sensation. A grave and dignified foreigner of distinguished bearing and appearance had arrived at the tavern, and entered this formidable name upon the register:

*Sherlock
Holmes!*

Sherlock Holmes.

The news buzzed from cabin to cabin, from claim to claim; tools were dropped, and the town swarmed toward the center of interest. A man passing out at the northern end of the village shouted it to Pat Riley, whose claim

was the next one to Flint Buckner's. At that time Fetlock Jones seemed to turn sick. He muttered to himself:

"Uncle *Sherlock!* The mean luck of it!—that *he* should come just when . . ." He dropped into a reverie, and presently said to himself: "But what's the use of being afraid of *him*? Anybody that knows him the way I do knows he can't detect a crime, except when he plans it all out beforehand and arranges the clues and hires some fellow to commit it according to instructions. . . . Now there ain't going to be any clues this time—so, what show has he got? None at all. No, sir; everything's ready. If I was to risk putting it off . . . No, I won't run any risk like that. Flint Buckner goes out of this world tonight, for sure." Then another trouble presented itself. "Uncle Sherlock'll be wanting to talk home matters with me this evening, and how am I going to get rid of him? for I've *got* to be at my cabin a minute or two about eight o'clock." This was an awkward matter, and cost him much thought. But he found a way to beat the difficulty. "We'll go for a walk, and I'll leave him in the road a minute, so that he won't see what it is I do: the best way to throw a detective off the track, anyway, is to have him along when you are preparing the thing. Yes, that's the safest—I'll take him with me."

*Fetlock's
uncle*

*Plan-
ning for
a detec-
tive*

Meantime the road in front of the tavern was blocked with villagers waiting and hoping for a glimpse of the great man. But he kept his room, and did not appear. None but Ferguson, Jake Parker the blacksmith, and Ham Sandwich had any luck. These enthusiastic admirers of the great scientific detective hired the tavern's detained-baggage lockup, which looked into the detective's room across a little alleyway ten or twelve feet wide, ambushed themselves in it, and cut some peepholes in the window blind. Mr. Holmes's blinds were down; but by and by he raised them. It gave the spies a hair-lifting but pleasurable thrill to find themselves face to face with the Extraordinary Man who had filled the world with the fame of his more-than-human ingenuities. There he sat—not a myth, not a shadow, but real, alive, compact of substance, and almost within touching distance with the hand.

*The
shadow
of
great-
ness*

Sherlock
in-
spected

"Look at that head!" said Ferguson, in an awed voice. "By gracious! *that's* a head!"

"You bet!" said the blacksmith, with deep reverence. "Look at his nose! look at his eyes! Intellect? Just a battery of it!"

"And that paleness," said Ham Sandwich. "Comes from thought—that's what it comes from. Hell! duffers like us don't know what real thought *is*."

"No more we don't," said Ferguson. "What we take for thinking is just blubber and slush."

"Right you are, Wells-Fargo. And look at that frown—that's *deep* thinking—away down, down, forty fathom into the bowels of things. He's on the track of something."

"Well, he is, and don't you forget it. Say—look at that awful gravity—look at that pallid solemnness—there ain't any corpse can lay over it."

"No, sir, not for dollars! And it's his'n by hereditary rights, too; he's been dead four times a'ready, and there's history for it. Three times natural, once by accident. I've heard say he smells damp and cold, like a grave. And he—"

Grind-
ing his
mind

"Sh! Watch him! There—he's got his thumb on the bump on the near corner of his forehead, and his forefinger on the off one. His think-works is just a-grinding now, you bet your other shirt."

"That's so. And now he's gazing up toward heaven and stroking his mustache slow, and—"

"Now he has rose up standing, and is putting his clues together on his left fingers with his right finger. See? he touches the forefinger—now middle finger—now ring finger—"

"Stuck!"

"Look at him scowl! He can't seem to make out *that* clue. So he—"

"See him smile!—like a tiger—and tally off the other fingers like nothing! He's got it, boys; he's got it sure!"

"Well, I should say! I'd hate to be in that man's place that he's after."

Mr. Holmes drew a table to the window, sat down with his back to the spies, and proceeded to write. The spies withdrew their eyes from the peepholes, lit their pipes,

and settled themselves for a comfortable smoke and talk. Ferguson said, with conviction:

"Boys, it's no use talking, he's a wonder! He's got the signs of it all over him."

"You hain't ever said a truer word than that, Wells-Fargo," said Jake Parker. "Say, wouldn't it 'a' been nuts if he'd a-been here last night?"

"Oh, by George, but wouldn't it!" said Ferguson. "Then we'd have seen *scientific* work. Intellect—just pure intellect—away up on the upper levels, dontchuknow. Archy is all right, and it don't become anybody to belittle *him*, I can tell you. But his gift is only just eyesight, sharp as an owl's, as near as I can make it out just a grand natural animal talent, no more, no less, and prime as far as it goes, but no intellect in it, and for-awfulness and marvellousness no more to be compared to what this man does than—than— Why, let me tell you what *he'd* have done. He'd have stepped over to Hogan's and glanced—just *glanced*, that's all—at the premises, and that's enough. See everything? Yes, sir, to the last little *detail*; and he'd know more about that place than the Hogans would know in seven years. Next, he would sit down on the bunk, just as ca'm and say to Mrs. Hogan—*Say*, Ham, consider that you are Mrs. Hogan. I'll ask the questions; you answer them."

"All right; go on."

"Madam, if you please—attention—do not let your mind wander. Now then—sex of the child?"

"Female, your Honor."

"Um—female. Very good, very good. Age?"

"Turned six, your Honor."

"Um—young, weak—two miles. Weariness will overtake it then. It will sink down and sleep. We shall find it two miles away, or less. Teeth?"

"Five, your Honor, and one a-coming."

"Very good, very good, *very* good indeed. You see, boys, *he* knows a clue when he sees it, when it wouldn't mean a dern thing to anybody else. Stockings, madam? Shoes?"

"Yes, your Honor—both."

"Yarn, perhaps? Morocco?"

"Yarn, your Honor. And kip."

"Um—kip. This complicates the matter. However, let

*Scientific
detecting*

*Just
ques-
tions*

it go—we shall manage. Religion?"

"Catholic, your Honor."

And
then!

"Very good. Snip me a bit from the bed blanket, please. Ah, thanks. Part wool—foreign make. Very well. A snip from some garment of the child's, please. Thanks. Cotton. Shows wear. An excellent clue, excellent. Pass me a pellet of the floor dirt, if you'll be so kind. Thanks, many thanks. Ah, admirable, admirable! *Now* we know where we are, I think. You see, boys, he's got all the clues he wants now; he don't need anything more. Now, then, what does this Extraordinary Man do? He lays those snips and that dirt out on the table and leans over them on his elbows, and puts them together side by side and studies them—mumbles to himself, 'Female'; changes them around—mumbles, 'Six years old'; changes them this way and that—again mumbles: 'Five teeth—one a-coming—Catholic—yarn—cotton—kip—damn that kip.' Then he straightens up and gazes toward heaven, and ploughs and ploughs, muttering, 'Damn that kip!' Then he stands up and frowns, and begins to tally off his clues on his fingers—and gets stuck at the ring finger. But only just a minute—then his face glares all up in a smile like a house afire, and he straightens up stately and majestic, and says to the crowd, 'Take a lantern, a couple of you, and go down to Injun Billy's and fetch the child—the rest of you go 'long home to bed; good night, madam; good night, gents.' And he bows like the Matterhorn, and pulls out for the tavern. That's *his* style, and the *Only*—scientific, intellectual—all over in fifteen minutes—no poking around all over the sagebrush range an hour and a half in a mass-meeting crowd for *him*, boys—you hear *me*!"

Easy
style

"By Jackson, it's grand!" said Ham Sandwich. "Wells-Fargo, you've got him down to a dot. He ain't painted up any exacter to the life in the books. By George, I can just see him—can't you, boys?"

"You bet you! It's just a photograft, that's what it is."

Ferguson was profoundly pleased with his success, and grateful. He sat silently enjoying his happiness a little while, then he murmured, with a deep awe in his voice,

"I wonder if God made him?"

"Made
in Ger-
many"

There was no response for a moment; then Ham Sandwich said, reverently, "Not all at one time, I reckon."

II

At eight o'clock that evening two persons were groping their way past Flint Buckner's cabin in the frosty gloom. They were Sherlock Holmes and his nephew.

"Stop here in the road a moment, Uncle," said Fetlock, "while I run to my cabin; I won't be gone a minute."

He asked for something—the uncle furnished it—then he disappeared in the darkness, but soon returned, and the talking-walk was resumed. By nine o'clock they had wandered back to the tavern. They worked their way through the billiard room, where a crowd had gathered in the hope of getting a glimpse of the Extraordinary Man. A royal cheer was raised. Mr. Holmes acknowledged the compliment with a series of courtly bows, and as he was passing out his nephew said to the assemblage,

"Uncle Sherlock's got some work to do, gentlemen, that'll keep him till twelve or one, but he'll be down again then, or earlier if he can, and hopes some of you'll be left to take a drink with him."

"By George, he's just a duke, boys! Three cheers for Sherlock Holmes, the greatest man that ever lived!" shouted Ferguson. "Hip, hip, hip—"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Tiger!"

The uproar shook the building, so hearty was the feeling the boys put into their welcome. Upstairs the uncle reproached the nephew gently, saying,

"What did you get me into that engagement for?"

"I reckon you don't want to be unpopular, do you, Uncle? Well, then, don't you put on any exclusiveness in a mining camp, that's all. The boys admire you; but if you was to leave without taking a drink with them, they'd set you down for a snob. And, besides, you said you had home talk enough in stock to keep us up and at it half the night."

The boy was right, and wise—the uncle acknowledged it. The boy was wise in another detail which he did not mention—except to himself: "Uncle and the others will come handy—in the way of nailing an *alibi* where it can't be budged."

He and his uncle talked diligently about three hours. Then, about midnight, Fetlock stepped downstairs and

*The
doomed
cabin*

*To treat
his ad-
mirers*

*An
alibi*

*Buck-
ner's
last
walk*

took a position in the dark a dozen steps from the tavern, and waited. Five minutes later Flint Buckner came rocking out of the billiard room and almost brushed him as he passed.

"I've got him!" muttered the boy. He continued to himself, looking after the shadowy form: "Goodbye—goodbye for good, Flint Buckner; you called my mother a—well, never mind what; it's all right, now; you're taking your last walk, friend."

He went musing back into the tavern. "From now till one is an hour. We'll spend it with the boys; it's good for the *alibi*."

He brought Sherlock Holmes to the billiard room, which was jammed with eager and admiring miners; the guest called the drinks, and the fun began. Everybody was happy; everybody was complimentary; the ice was soon broken; songs, anecdotes, and more drinks followed, and the pregnant minutes flew. At six minutes to one, when the jollity was at its highest—

Boom!

*The
explo-
sion*

There was silence instantly. The deep sound came rolling and rumbling from peak to peak up the gorge, then died down, and ceased. The spell broke, then, and the men made a rush for the door, saying,

"Something's blown up!"

Outside, a voice in the darkness said,

"It's away down the gorge; I saw the flash."

The crowd poured down the canyon—Holmes, Fetlock, Archy Stillman, everybody. They made the mile in a few minutes. By the light of a lantern they found the smooth and solid dirt floor of Flint Buckner's cabin; of the cabin itself not a vestige remained, not a rag nor a splinter. Nor any sign of Flint. Search parties sought here and there and yonder, and presently a cry went up.

"Here he is!"

It was true. Fifty yards down the gulch they had found him—that is, they had found a crushed and lifeless mass which represented him. Fetlock Jones hurried thither with the others and looked.

*Impa-
tient
jury*

The inquest was a fifteen minute affair. Ham Sandwich, foreman of the jury, handed up the verdict, which was phrased with a certain unstudied literary grace, and

closed with this finding, to wit: that "deceased came to his death by his own act or some other person or persons unknown to this jury not leaving any family or similar effects behind but his cabin which was blown away and God have mercy on his soul amen."

Then the impatient jury rejoined the main crowd, for the storm-center of interest was there—Sherlock Holmes. The miners stood silent and reverent in a half-circle, enclosing a large vacant space which included the front exposure of the site of the late premises. In this considerable space the Extraordinary Man was moving about, attended by his nephew with a lantern. With a tape he took measurements of the cabin site; of the distance from the wall of chaparral to the road; of the height of the chaparral bushes; also various other measurements. He gathered a rag here, a splinter there, and a pinch of earth yonder, inspected them profoundly, and preserved them. He took the "lay" of the place with a pocket compass, allowing two seconds for magnetic variation. He took the time (Pacific) by his watch, correcting it for local time. He paced off the distance from the cabin site to the corpse, and corrected that for tidal differentiation. He took the altitude with a pocket aneroid, and the temperature with a pocket thermometer. Finally he said, with a stately bow: "It is finished. Shall we return, gentlemen?"

He took up the line of march for the tavern, and the crowd fell into his wake, earnestly discussing and admiring the Extraordinary Man, and interlarding guesses as to the origin of the tragedy and who the author of it might be.

"My, but it's grand luck having him here—hey, boys?" said Ferguson.

"It's the biggest thing of the century," said Ham Sandwich. "It'll go all over the world; you mark my words."

"You bet!" said Jake Parker the blacksmith. "It'll boom this camp. Ain't that so, Wells-Fargo?"

"Well, as you want my opinion—if it's any sign of how I think about it, I can tell you this: yesterday I was holding the Straight Flush claim at two dollars a foot; I'd like to see the man that can get it at sixteen today."

"Right you are, Wells-Fargo! It's the grandest luck a new camp ever struck. Say, did you see him collar them

*Sherlock's
real job*

*Luck
for the
camp*

*Bunches
of clues*

little rags and dirt and things? What an eye! He just can't overlook a clue—'tain't in him."

"That's so. And they wouldn't mean a thing to anybody else; but to him, why, they're just a book—large print at that."

"Sure's you're born! Them odds and ends have got their little old secret, and they think there ain't anybody can pull it; but, land! when he sets his grip there they've got to squeal, and don't you forget it."

"Boys, I ain't sorry, now, that he wasn't here to roust out the child; this is a bigger thing, by a long sight. Yes, sir, and more tangled up and scientific and intellectual."

"I reckon we're all of us glad it's turned out this way. Glad? 'George! it ain't any name for it. Dontchuknow, Archy could've *learnt* something if he'd had the nous to stand by and take notice of how that man works the system. But no; he went poking up into the chaparral and just missed the whole thing."

*Who did
it?*

"It's true as gospel; I seen it myself. Well, Archy's young. He'll know better one of these days."

"Say, boys, who do you reckon done it?"

That was a difficult question, and brought out a world of unsatisfying conjecture. Various men were mentioned as possibilities, but one by one they were discarded as not being eligible. No one but young Hillyer had been intimate with Flint Buckner; no one had really had a quarrel with him; he had affronted every man who had tried to make up to him, although not quite offensively enough to require bloodshed. There was one name that was upon every tongue from the start, but it was the last to get utterance—Fetlock Jones's. It was Pat Riley that mentioned it.

"Oh, well," the boys said, "of course we've all thought of him, because he had a million rights to kill Flint Buckner, and it was just his plain duty to do it. But all the same there's two things we can't get around: for one thing, he hasn't got the sand; and for another, he wasn't anywhere near the place when it happened."

*Fetlock's
alibi*

"I know it," said Pat. "He was there in the billiard room with us when it happened."

"Yes, and was there all the time for an hour *before* it happened."

"It's so. And lucky for him, too. He'd have been suspected in a minute if it hadn't been for that."

III

The tavern dining room had been cleared of all its furniture save one six foot pine table and a chair. This table was against one end of the room; the chair was on it; Sherlock Holmes, stately, imposing, impressive, sat in the chair. The public stood. The room was full. The tobacco smoke was dense, the stillness profound.

*Sherlock
stately*

The Extraordinary Man raised his hand to command additional silence; held it in the air a few moments; then, in brief, crisp terms he put forward question after question, and noted the answers with "Um-ums," nods of the head, and so on. By this process he learned all about Flint Buckner, his character, conduct, and habits, that people were able to tell him. It thus transpired that the Extraordinary Man's nephew was the only person in the camp who had a killing-grudge against Flint Buckner. Mr. Holmes smiled compassionately upon the witness, and asked, languidly—

"Do any of you gentlemen chance to know where the lad Fetlock Jones was at the time of the explosion?"

A thunderous response followed—

"In the billiard room of this house!"

"Ah. And had he just come in?"

"Been there all of an hour!"

"Ah. It is about—about—well, about how far might it be to the scene of the explosion?"

"All of a mile!"

"Ah. It isn't *much* of an alibi, 'tis true, but—"

A storm-burst of laughter, mingled with shouts of, "By jiminy, but he's chain-lightning!" and, "Ain't you sorry you spoke, Sandy?" shut off the rest of the sentence, and the crushed witness drooped his blushing face in pathetic shame. The inquisitor resumed:

"The lad Jones's somewhat *distant* connection with the case" (*laughter*) "having been disposed of, let us now call the *eye-witnesses* of the tragedy, and listen to what they have to say."

*Just
ques-
tions*

He got out his fragmentary clues and arranged them on a sheet of cardboard on his knee. The house held its breath and watched.

A few
words

"We have the longitude and the latitude, corrected for magnetic variation, and this gives us the exact location of the tragedy. We have the altitude, the temperature, and the degree of humidity prevailing—inestimably valuable, since they enable us to estimate with precision the degree of influence which they would exercise upon the mood and disposition of the assassin at that time of the night." (*Buzz of admiration; muttered remark, "By George, but he's deep!"*) He fingered his clues. "And now let us ask these mute witnesses to speak to us."

More
words

"Here we have an empty linen shot-bag. What is its message? This: that robbery was the motive, not revenge. What is its further message? This: that the assassin was of inferior intelligence—shall we say light-witted, or perhaps approaching that? How do we know this? Because a person of sound intelligence would not have proposed to rob the man Buckner, who never had much money with him. But the assassin might have been a stranger? Let the bag speak again. I take from it this article. It is a bit of silver-bearing quartz. It is peculiar. Examine it, please—you—and you—and you. Now pass it back, please. There is but one lode on this coast which produces just that character and color of quartz; and that is a lode which crops out for nearly two miles on a stretch, and in my opinion is destined, at no distant day, to confer upon its locality a globe-girdling celebrity, and upon its two hundred owners riches beyond the dreams of avarice. Name that lode, please."

"The Consolidated Christian Science and Mary Ann!" was the prompt response.

A wild crash of hurrahs followed, and every man reached for his neighbor's hand and wrung it, with tears in his eyes; and Wells-Fargo Ferguson shouted, "The Straight Flush is on the lode, and up she goes to a hundred and fifty a foot—you hear me!"

When quiet fell, Mr. Holmes resumed:

"We perceive, then, that three facts are established, to wit: the assassin was approximately light-witted; he was not a stranger; his motive was robbery, not revenge. Let

us proceed. I hold in my hand a small fragment of fuse, with the recent smell of fire upon it. What is its testimony? Taken with the corroborative evidence of the quartz, it reveals to us that the assassin was a miner. What does it tell us further? This, gentlemen: that the assassination was consummated by means of an explosive. What else does it say? This: that the explosive was located against the side of the cabin nearest the road—the front side—for within six feet of that spot I found it.

"I hold in my fingers a burnt Swedish match—the kind one rubs on a safety-box. I found it in the road, six hundred twenty-two feet from the abolished cabin. What does it say? This: that the train was fired from that point. What further does it tell us? This: that the assassin was left-handed. How do I know this? I should not be able to explain to you, gentlemen, how I know it, the signs being so subtle that only long experience and deep study can enable one to detect them. But the signs are here, and they are reinforced by a fact which you must have often noticed in the great detective narratives—that *all* assassins are left-handed."

"By Jackson, *that's* so!" said Ham Sandwich, bringing his great hand down with a resounding slap upon his thigh; "blamed if I ever thought of it before."

"Nor I!" "Nor I!" cried several. "Oh, there can't anything escape *him*—look at his eye!"

"Gentlemen, distant as the murderer was from his doomed victim, he did not wholly escape injury. This fragment of wood which I now exhibit to you struck him. It drew blood. Wherever he is, he bears the telltale mark. I picked it up where he stood when he fired the fatal train." He looked out over the house from his high perch, and his countenance began to darken; he slowly raised his hand, and pointed—

"There stands the assassin!"

For a moment the house was paralyzed with amazement; then twenty voices burst out with:

"Sammy Hillyer? Oh, *hell*, no! *Him*? It's pure foolishness!"

"Take care, gentlemen—be not hasty. Observe—he has the bloodmark on his brow."

Hillyer turned white with fright. He was near to crying.

*Left-
handed
villainy*

*Guess at
the
criminal*

He turned this way and that, appealing to every face for help and sympathy; and held out his supplicating hands toward Holmes and began to plead:

"Don't, oh, don't! I never did it; I give my word I never did it. The way I got this hurt on my forehead was—"

"Arrest him, constable!" cried Holmes. "I will swear out the warrant."

The constable moved reluctantly forward—hesitated—stopped.

Hillyer broke out with another appeal. "Oh, Archy, don't let them do it; it would kill Mother! You know how I got the hurt. Tell them, and save me, Archy; save me!"

Stillman worked his way to the front, and said:

"Yes, I'll save you. Don't be afraid." Then he said to the house, "Never mind how he got the hurt; it hasn't anything to do with this case, and isn't of any consequence."

"God bless you, Archy, for a true friend!"

"Hurrah for Archy! Go in, boy, and play 'em a knock-down flush to their two pair 'n' a jack!" shouted the house, pride in their home talent and a patriotic sentiment of loyalty to it rising suddenly in the public heart and changing the whole attitude of the situation.

Young Stillman waited for the noise to cease; then he said,

"I will ask Tom Jeffries to stand by that door yonder, and Constable Harris to stand by the other one here, and not let anybody leave the room."

"Said and done. Go on, old man!"

"The criminal is present, I believe. I will show him to you before long, in case I am right in my guess. Now I will tell you all about the tragedy, from start to finish. The motive *wasn't* robbery; it was revenge. The murderer *wasn't* light-witted. He *didn't* stand six hundred twenty-two feet away. He *didn't* get hit with a piece of wood. He *didn't* place the explosive against the cabin. He *didn't* bring a shot-bag with him, and he *wasn't* left-handed. With the exception of these errors, the distinguished guest's statement of the case is substantially correct."

A comfortable laugh rippled over the house; friend nodded to friend, as much as to say, "That's the word, with the bark on it. Good 'lad, good boy. *He* ain't lowering his flag any!"

Archy
to the
rescue

The
criminal
present

The guest's serenity was not disturbed. Stillman resumed:

"I also have some witnesses; and I will presently tell you where you can find some more." He held up a piece of coarse wire; the crowd craned their necks to see. "It has a smooth coating of melted tallow on it. And here is a candle which is burned halfway down. The remaining half of it has marks cut upon it an inch apart. Soon I will tell you where I found these things. I will now put aside reasonings, guesses, the impressive hitching of odds and ends of clues together, and the other showy theatricals of the detective trade, and tell you in a plain, straightforward way just how this dismal thing happened."

He paused a moment, for effect—to allow silence and suspense to intensify and concentrate the house's interest; then he went on:

"The assassin studied out his plan with a good deal of pains. It was a good plan, very ingenious, and showed an intelligent mind, not a feeble one. It was a plan which was well calculated to ward off all suspicion from its inventor. In the first place, he marked a candle into spaces an inch apart, and lit it and timed it. He found it took three hours to burn four inches of it. I tried it myself for half an hour, a while ago, upstairs here, while the inquiry into Flint Buckner's character and ways was being conducted in this room, and I arrived in that way at the rate of a candle's consumption when sheltered from the wind. Having proved his trial candle's rate, he blew it out—I have already shown it to you—and put his inch-marks on a fresh one."

"He put the fresh one into a tin candlestick. Then at the five-hour mark he bored a hole through the candle with a red-hot wire. I have already shown you the wire, with a smooth coat of tallow on it—tallow that had been melted and had cooled."

"With labor—very hard labor, I should say—he struggled up through the stiff chaparral that clothes the steep hillside back of Flint Buckner's place, tugging an empty flour barrel with him. He placed it in that absolutely secure hiding-place, and in the bottom of it he set the candlestick. Then he measured off about thirty-five feet of fuse—the barrel's distance from the back of the cabin."

*Telltale
evidence*

*Just
how it
happened*

*Laying
the mine*

He bored a hole in the side of the barrel—there is the large gimlet he did it with. He went on and finished his work; and when it was done, one end of the fuse was in Buckner's cabin, and the other end, with a notch chipped in it to expose the powder, was in the hole in the candle—timed to blow the place up at one o'clock this morning, provided the candle was lit about eight o'clock yesterday evening—which I am betting it was—and provided there was an explosive in the cabin and connected with that end of the fuse—which I am also betting there was, though I can't prove it. Boys, the barrel is there in the chaparral, the candle's remains are in it in the tin stick; the burnt-out fuse is in the gimlet-hole, the other end is down the hill where the late cabin stood. I saw them all an hour or two ago, when the professor here was measuring off unimplicated vacancies and collecting relics that hadn't anything to do with the case."

He paused. The house drew a long, deep breath, shook its strained cords and muscles free, and burst into cheers.

"Dang him!" said Ham Sandwich, "that's why he was snooping around in the chaparral, instead of picking up points out of the p'fessor's game. Looky here—he ain't no fool, boys."

"No, sir! Why, great Scott—"

But Stillman was resuming:

"While we were out yonder an hour or two ago, the owner of the gimlet and the trial candle took them from a place where he had concealed them—it was not a good place—and carried them to what he probably thought was a better one, two hundred yards up in the pine woods, and hid them there, covering them over with pine needles. It was there that I found them. The gimlet exactly fits the hole in the barrel. And now—"

The Extraordinary Man interrupted him. He said, sarcastically:

"We have had a very pretty fairytale, gentlemen—very pretty indeed. Now I would like to ask this young man a question or two."

Some of the boys winced, and Ferguson said,

"I'm afraid Archy's going to catch it now."

The others lost their smiles and sobered down. Mr. Holmes said:

*A
second
hiding-
place*

*A pretty
fairytale*

"Let us proceed to examine into this fairytale in a consecutive and orderly way—by geometrical progression, so to speak—linking detail to detail in a steadily advancing and remorselessly consistent and unassailable march upon this tinsel toy-fortress of error, the dream-fabric of a callow imagination. To begin with, young sir, I desire to ask you but three questions at present—at present. Did I understand you to say it was your opinion that the suppositious candle was lighted at about eight o'clock yesterday evening?"

"Yes, sir—about eight."

"Could you say exactly eight?"

"Well, no, I couldn't be that exact."

"Um. If a person had been passing along there just about that time, he would have been almost sure to encounter that assassin, do you think?"

"Yes, I should think so."

"Thank you, that is all. For the present. I say, all for the present."

"Dern him! he's laying for Archy," said Ferguson.

"It's so," said Ham Sandwich. "I don't like the look of it."

Stillman said, glancing at the guest,

"I was along there myself at half past eight—no, about nine."

"Indeed? This is interesting—this is very interesting. Perhaps you encountered the assassin yourself?"

"No, I encountered no one."

"Ah. Then—if you will excuse the remark—I do not quite see the relevancy of the information."

"It has none. At present. I say it has none—at present." He paused. Presently he resumed: "I did not encounter the assassin, but I am on his track, I am sure, for I believe he is in this room. I will ask you all to pass one by one in front of me—here, where there is a good light—so that I can see your feet."

A buzz of excitement swept the place, and the march began, the guest looking on with an iron attempt at gravity which was not an unqualified success. Stillman stooped, shaded his eyes with his hand, and gazed down intently at each pair of feet as it passed. Fifty men tramped monotonously by—with no result. Sixty. Sev-

*The
time
test*

*On the
spot*

*Watch-
ing their
feet*

enty. The thing was beginning to look absurd. The guest remarked, with suave irony,

"Assassins appear to be scarce this evening."

The house saw the humor of it, and refreshed itself with a cordial laugh. Ten or twelve more candidates tramped by—no, *danced* by, with airy and ridiculous capers which convulsed the spectators—then suddenly Stillman put out his hand and said,

"This is the assassin!"

*The real
assassin*

"Fetlock Jones, by the great Sanhedrim!" roared the crowd; and at once let fly a pyrotechnic explosion and dazzle and confusion of stirring remarks inspired by the situation.

At the height of the turmoil the guest stretched out his hand, commanding peace. The authority of a great name and a great personality laid its mysterious compulsion upon the house, and it obeyed. Out of the panting calm which succeeded, the guest spoke, saying, with dignity and feeling:

"*This* is serious. It strikes at an innocent life. Innocent beyond suspicion! Innocent beyond peradventure! Hear me *prove* it; observe how simple a fact can brush out of existence this witless lie. Listen. My friends, that lad was never out of my sight yesterday evening at *any* time!"

It made a deep impression. Men turned their eyes upon Stillman with grave inquiry in them. His face brightened, and he said,

"I *knew* there was another one!" He stepped briskly to the table and glanced at the guest's feet, then up at his face, and said: "You were *with* him! You were not fifty steps from him when he lit the candle that by and by fired the powder!" (*Sensation.*) "And what is more, you furnished the matches yourself!"

*He fur-
nished
matches*

Plainly the guest seemed hit; it looked so to the public. He opened his mouth to speak; the words did not come freely.

"This—er—this is insanity—this—"

Stillman pressed his evident advantage home. He held up a charred match.

"Here is one of them. I found it in the barrel—and there's *another* one there."

The guest found his voice at once.

"Yes—and put them there yourself!"

It was recognized as a good shot. Stillman retorted:

"It is *wax*—a breed unknown to this camp. I am ready to be searched for the box. Are you?"

The guest was staggered this time—the dullest eye could see it. He fumbled with his hands; once or twice his lips moved, but the words did not come. The house waited and watched, in tense suspense, the stillness adding effect to the situation. Presently Stillman said, gently,

"We are waiting for your decision."

There was silence again during several moments; then the guest answered, in a low voice,

"I refuse to be searched."

There was no noisy demonstration, but all about the house one voice after another muttered:

"That settles it! He's Archy's meat."

*Archy's
meat*

What to do now? Nobody seemed to know. It was an embarrassing situation for the moment—merely, of course, because matters had taken such a sudden and unexpected turn that these unpracticed minds were not prepared for it, and had come to a standstill, like a stopped clock, under the shock. But after a little the machinery began to work again, tentatively, and by twos and threes the men put their heads together and privately buzzed over this and that and the other proposition. One of these propositions met with much favor; it was to confer upon the assassin a vote of thanks for removing Flint Buckner, and let him go. But the cooler heads opposed it, pointing out that ad-dled brains in the eastern states would pronounce it a scandal, and make no end of foolish noise about it. In the end the cool heads got the upper hand, and obtained general consent to a proposition of their own, and their leader then called the house to order and stated it—to this effect: that Fetlock Jones be jailed and put upon his trial.

*Thank-
ing the
assassin*

The motion was carried. Apparently there was nothing further to do now, and the people were glad, for, privately, they were impatient to get out and rush to the scene of the tragedy, and see whether that barrel and the other things were really there or not.

But no—the breakup got a check. The surprises were not over yet. For a while Fetlock Jones had been silently

*The
confes-
sion.*

sobbing, unnoticed in the absorbing excitements which had been following one another so persistently for some time; but when his arrest and trial were decreed, he broke out despairingly, and said:

"No! it's no use. I don't want any jail, I don't want any trial; I've had all the hard luck I want, and all the miseries. Hang me now, and let me out! It would all come out, anyway—there couldn't anything save me. He has told it all, just as if he'd been with me and seen it—I don't know how he found out; and you'll find the barrel and things, and then I wouldn't have any chance any more. I killed him; and *you'd* have done it too, if he'd treated you like a dog, and you only a boy, and weak and poor, and not a friend to help you."

"And served him damned well right!" broke in Ham Sandwich. "Looky here, boys—"

From the constable: "Order! Order, gentlemen!"

A voice: "Did your uncle know what you was up to?"

"No, he didn't."

"Did he give you the matches, sure enough?"

"Yes, he did; but he didn't know what I wanted them for."

"When you was out on such a business as that, how did you venture to risk having him along—and him a *detective*? How's that?"

The boy hesitated, fumbled with his buttons in an embarrassed way, then said, shyly,

"I know about detectives, on account of having them in the family; and if you don't want them to find out about a thing, it's best to have them around when you do it."

The cyclone of laughter which greeted this naïve discharge of wisdom did not modify the poor little waif's embarrassment in any large degree.

IV

From a Letter to Mrs. Stillman. Dated merely "Tuesday."

Fetlock Jones was put under lock and key in an unoccupied log cabin, and left there to await his trial. Constable Harris provided him with a couple of days' rations, instructed him to keep a good guard

*Uses for
a detec-
tive*

over himself, and promised to look in on him as soon as further supplies should be due.

Next morning a score of us went with Hillyer, out of friendship, and helped him bury his late relative, the unlamented Buckner, and I acted as first assistant pall-bearer, Hillyer acting as chief. Just as we had finished our labors a ragged and melancholy stranger, carrying an old handbag, limped by with his head down, and I caught the scent I had chased around the globe! It was the odor of Paradise to my perishing hope!

In a moment I was at his side and had laid a gentle hand upon his shoulder. He slumped to the ground as if a stroke of lightning had withered him in his tracks; and as the boys came running he struggled to his knees and put up his pleading hands to me, and out of his chattering jaws he begged me to persecute him no more, and said,

"You have hunted me around the world, Sherlock Holmes, yet God is my witness I have never done any man harm!"

A glance at his wild eyes showed us that he was insane. That was my work, Mother! The tidings of your death can some day repeat the misery I felt at that moment, but nothing else can ever do it. The boys lifted him up, and gathered about him, and were full of pity of him, and said the gentlest and touchiest things to him, and said cheer up and don't be troubled, he was among friends now, and they would take care of him, and protect him, and hang any man that laid a hand on him. They are just like so many mothers, the rough mining-camp boys are, when you wake up the south side of their hearts; yes, and just like so many reckless and unreasoning children when you wake up the opposite side of that muscle. They did everything they could think of to comfort him, but nothing succeeded until Wells-Fargo Ferguson, who is a clever strategist, said,

"If it's only Sherlock Holmes that's troubling you, you needn't worry any more."

"Why?" asked the forlorn lunatic, eagerly.

"Because he's dead again."

"Dead! Dead! Oh, don't trifle with a poor wreck like me. Is he dead? On honor, now—is he telling me true, boys?"

"True as you're a-standing there!" said Ham Sandwich,

*The
missing
one
found*

*Driven
insane*

*Sherlock
dead
again*

*Hanged
by mis-
take*

and they all backed up the statement in a body.

"They hung him in San Bernardino last week," added Ferguson, clinching the matter, "whilst he was searching around for you. Mistook him for another man. They're sorry, but they can't help it now."

"They're a-building him a monument," said Ham Sandwich, with the air of a person who had contributed to it, and knew.

"James Walker" drew a deep sigh—evidently a sigh of relief—and said nothing; but his eyes lost something of their wildness, his countenance cleared visibly, and its drawn look relaxed a little. We all went to our cabin, and the boys cooked him the best dinner the camp could furnish the materials for, and while they were about it Hill-yer and I outfitted him from hat to shoe-leather with new clothes of ours, and made a comely and presentable old gentleman of him. "Old" is the right word, and a pity, too; old by the droop of him, and the frost upon his hair, and the marks which sorrow and distress have left upon his face; though he is only in his prime in the matter of years. While he ate, we smoked and chatted; and when he was finishing he found his voice at last, and of his own accord broke out with his personal history. I cannot furnish his exact words, but I will come as near it as I can.

*Soothing
the old
man*

The "Wrong Man's" Story.

It happened like this: I was in Denver. I had been there many years; sometimes I remember how many, sometimes I don't—but it isn't any matter. All of a sudden I got a notice to leave, or I would be exposed for a horrible crime committed long before—years and years before—in the East. I knew about that crime, but I was not the criminal; it was a cousin of mine of the same name. What should I better do? My head was all disordered by fear, and I didn't know. I was allowed very little time—only one day, I think it was. I would be ruined if I was published, and the people would lynch me, and not believe what I said. It is always the way with lynchings; when they find out it is a mistake they are sorry, but it is too late—the same as it was with Mr. Holmes, you see. So I said I would sell out and get money to live on, and run away until it blew

over and I could come back with my proofs. Then I escaped in the night and went a long way off in the mountains somewhere, and lived disguised and had a false name.

I got more and more troubled and worried, and my troubles made me see spirits and hear voices, and I could not think straight and clear on any subject, but got confused and involved and had to give it up, because my head hurt so. It got to be worse and worse; more spirits and more voices. They were about me all the time; at first only in the night, then in the day too. They were always whispering around my bed and plotting against me, and it broke my sleep and kept me fagged out, because I got no good rest.

And then came the worst. One night the whispers said, "We'll never manage, because we can't see him, and so can't point him out to the people."

They sighed; then one said: "We must bring Sherlock Holmes. He can be here in twelve days."

They all agreed, and whispered and jibbered with joy. But my heart broke; for I had read about that man, and knew what it would be to have him upon my track, with his super-human penetration and tireless energies.

The spirits went away to fetch him, and I got up at once in the middle of the night and fled away, carrying nothing but the handbag that had my money in it—thirty thousand dollars; two-thirds of it are in the bag there yet. It was forty days before that man caught up on my track. I just escaped. From habit he had written his real name on a tavern register, but had scratched it out and written "Dagget Barclay" in the place of it. But fear gives you a watchful eye and keen, and I read the true name through the scratches, and fled like a deer.

He has hunted me all over this world for three years and a half—the Pacific States, Australasia, India—everywhere you can think of; then back to Mexico and up to California again, giving me hardly any rest; but that name on the registers always saved me, and what is left of me is alive yet. And I am so tired! A cruel time he has given me, yet I give you my honor I have never harmed him nor any man.

That was the end of the story, and it stirred those boys

*Restless
voices*

*Fleeing
from
Sherlock*

*Hunted
for
years*

Self-
reproach

to blood-heat, be sure of it. As for me—each word burnt a hole in me where it struck.

We voted that the old man should bunk with us, and be my guest and Hillyer's. I shall keep my own counsel, naturally; but as soon as he is well rested and nourished, I shall take him to Denver and rehabilitate his fortunes.

The boys gave the old fellow the bone-mashing good-fellowship handshake of the mines, and then scattered away to spread the news.

At dawn next morning Wells-Fargo Ferguson and Ham Sandwich called us softly out, and said, privately:

"That news about the way the old stranger has been treated has spread all around, and the camps are up. They are piling in from everywhere, and are going to lynch the p'fessor. Constable Harris is in a dead funk, and has telephoned the sheriff. Come along!"

After
Sherlock
again

We started on a run. The others were privileged to feel as they chose, but in my heart's privacy I hoped the sheriff would arrive in time, for I had small desire that Sherlock Holmes should hang for my deeds, as you can easily believe. I had heard a good deal about the sheriff, but for reassurance's sake I asked,

"Can he stop a mob?"

"Can *he* stop a mob! Can Jack Fairfax stop a mob! Well, I should smile! Ex-desperado—nineteen scalps on his string. Can *he*! Oh, I say!"

As we tore up the gulch, distant cries and shouts and yells rose faintly on the still air, and grew steadily in strength as we raced along. Roar after roar burst out, stronger and stronger, nearer and nearer; and at last, when we closed up upon the multitude massed in the open area in front of the tavern, the crash of sound was deafening. Some brutal roughs from Daly's Gorge had Holmes in their grip, and he was the calmest man there; a contemptuous smile played about his lips, and if any fear of death was in his British heart, his iron personality was master of it, and no sign of it was allowed to appear.

"Come to a vote, men!" This from one of the Daly gang, Shadbelly Higgins. "Quick! is it hang, or shoot?"

"Neither!" shouted one of his comrades. "He'd be alive again in a week; burning's the only permanency for *him*."

The gangs from all the outlying camps burst out in a

Burn
him

thunder-crash of approval, and went struggling and surging toward the prisoner, and closed around him, shouting, "Fire! fire's the ticket!" They dragged him to the horse-post, backed him against it, chained him to it, and piled wood and pine cones around him waist-deep. Still the strong face did not blench, and still the scornful smile played about the thin lips.

"A match! fetch a match!"

Shadbelly struck it, shaded it with his hand, stooped, and held it under a pine cone. A deep silence fell upon the mob. The cone caught, a tiny flame flickered about it a moment or two. I seemed to catch the sound of distant hoofs—it grew more distinct—still more and more distinct, more and more definite, but the absorbed crowd did not appear to notice it. The match went out. The man struck another, stooped, and again the flame rose; this time it took hold and began to spread—here and there men turned away their faces. The executioner stood with the charred match in his fingers, watching his work. The hoofbeats turned a projecting crag, and now they came thundering down upon us. Almost the next moment there was a shout—

"The sheriff!"

And straightway he came tearing into the midst, stood his horse almost on his hind feet, and said,

"Fall back, you guttersnipes!"

He was obeyed. By all but their leader. He stood his ground, and his hand went to his revolver. The sheriff covered him promptly, and said:

"Drop your hand, you parlor-desperado. Kick the fire away. Now unchain the stranger."

The parlor-desperado obeyed. Then the sheriff made a speech; sitting his horse at martial ease, and not warming his words with any touch of fire, but delivering them in a measured and deliberate way, and in a tone which harmonized with their character and made them impressively disrespectful.

"You're a nice lot—now ain't you? Just about eligible to travel with this bilk here—Shadbelly Higgins—this loud-mouthed sneak that shoots people in the back and calls himself a desperado. If there's anything I do particularly despise, it's a lynching mob; I've never seen one

*Funeral
pyre*

*The
sheriff*

*Cowing
the mob*

that had a man in it. It has to tally up a hundred against one before it can pump up pluck enough to tackle a sick tailor. It's made up of cowards, and so is the community that breeds it; and ninety-nine times out of a hundred the sheriff's another one." He paused—apparently to turn that last idea over in his mind and taste the juice of it—then he went on: "The sheriff that lets a mob take a prisoner away from him is the lowest-down coward there is. By the statistics there was a hundred and eighty-two of them drawing sneak pay in America last year. By the way it's going, pretty soon there'll be a new disease in the doctor books—*sheriff complaint*." That idea pleased him—anyone could see it. "People will say, 'Sheriff sick again?' 'Yes; got the same old thing.' And next there'll be a new title. People won't say, 'He's running for sheriff of Rapaho County,' for instance; they'll say, 'He's running for Coward of Rapaho.' Lord, the idea of a grownup person being afraid of a lynch mob!"

He turned an eye on the captive, and said, "Stranger, who are you, and what have you been doing?"

"My name is Sherlock Holmes, and I have not been doing anything."

*A name
to con-
jure
with*

It was wonderful, the impression which the sound of that name made on the sheriff, notwithstanding he must have come posted. He spoke up with feeling, and said it was a blot on the country that a man whose marvelous exploits had filled the world with their fame and their ingenuity, and whose histories of them had won every reader's heart by the brilliancy and charm of their literary setting, should be visited under the Stars and Stripes by an outrage like this. He apologized in the name of the whole nation, and made Holmes a most handsome bow, and told Constable Harris to see him to his quarters, and hold himself personally responsible if he was molested again. Then he turned to the mob and said:

*Driven
to their
holes*

"Hunt your holes, you scum!" which they did; then he said: "Follow me, Shadbelly; I'll take care of your case myself. No—keep your popgun; whenever I see the day that I'll be afraid to have you behind me with that thing, it'll be time for me to join last year's hundred and eighty-two"; and he rode off in a walk, Shadbelly following.

When we were on our way back to our cabin, toward

breakfast-time, we ran upon the news that Fetlock Jones had escaped from his lockup in the night and is gone! Nobody is sorry. Let his uncle track him if he likes; it is in his line; the camp is not interested.

*Fetlock
escapes*

V

T*en days later.*—"James Walker" is all right in body now, and his mind shows improvement too. I start with him for Denver tomorrow morning.

Next night. Brief note, mailed at a way station.—As we were starting this morning, Hillyer whispered to me: "Keep this news from Walker until you think it safe and not likely to disturb his mind and check his improvement: the ancient crime he spoke of was really committed—and by his cousin, as he said. *We buried the real criminal* the other day—the unhappiest man that has lived in a century—Flint Buckner. His real name was Jacob Fuller!" There, Mother, by the help of me, an unwitting mourner, your husband and my father is in his grave. Let him rest.

*The
real
criminal*

THE END

SOLUTION TO THE SEPTEMBER "UNSOLVED":

The secret word was "pyx."

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

Photo by Mike Mouchette



TONY HILLERMAN

Tony Hillerman has written more than a half dozen novels, most of them featuring one of two Navajo tribal policemen. While Hillerman has been praised and honored repeatedly for his plots, characters, skill at creating suspense—in short, all the qualities that make for an outstanding novelist—no one, either, has denied that much of the appeal of his books is in the Navajo and other Native American characters and lore that appear in their pages.

To read Hillerman is to walk in the steps of a Navajo tribal policeman as he investigates the several crimes on his roster at the time. Central to each book is a murder, one related to his "beat," the Big Reserva-

tion territory in New Mexico. These are not just crimes of white men investigated by tribal police: these are crimes particular to the territory, to this land of breathtaking views and grinding poverty; to the desert and mountains and arroyos and canyons and caves that serve as the books' background.

Thus, in *People of Darkness*, Jim Chee investigates a robbery allegedly the work of a peyote-using Navajo cult; in *The Dark Wind* he searches for the vandal of a government-placed windmill. In *The Ghostway*, Chee cannot stop asking a crucial question: Why, he puzzles, does an orthodox old Navajo allow a slow-dying relative to remain in his hogan (his hut) until he expires? The Navajo

believe that the hogan must then be purified and abandoned, forever haunted by the evil in the spirit of the deceased.

The Blessing Way introduced Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn, who went on to play an even larger role in *Dance Hall of the Dead* and *Listening Woman*. There is lots of action in these three, with down-to-the-wire suspense, while Hillerman slowly adds to the reader's knowledge of Navajo ways.

People of Darkness brought in Jim Chee, new on the job. Like Leaphorn, Chee is a college graduate. He is studying under his uncle to become a Singer, the Navajo equivalent of a medicine man, one who learns by heart the songs and rituals crucial to a Navajo's maintenance of harmony, or *hozra*.

Chee appears again in *The Dark Wind*, and most recently in *The Ghostway*. He is in his early thirties, has studied anthropology, and is interested in other cultures and other religions. (The Navajo do not, strictly speaking, have a religion.) He meets a schoolteacher from Wisconsin, and a relationship develops over the course of the novels. He follows his uncle's rule, to learn the ways of the white man before becoming a *yataalii*, a Singer, to his people. Like Leaphorn, he respects

the old ways, and the ways of others. He believes in his work and applies the Navajo concept of an orderly universe to an orderly investigation. Though there are occasional conflicts and internal struggles between their roles and their lives as Navajo men, both Chee and Leaphorn continue to live in the ways of the People.

Because these are mysteries, and murder is at their core, there is much in the novels about Navajo beliefs concerning death. Thus there is much about witches, for witches deal in death. We hear time and again the rumors of Navajo wolves, or witches; of "corpse powder," one of their talismans; of purification ceremonies. At death, a Navajo believes that a man's life has truly ended. Premeditated murder, then, is the worst perversion of the Navajo way, as alien to them as gathering wealth—more than one needs to maintain life and harmony—or wreaking vengeance.

These novels create their own milieu so persuasively that a reader can truly step into another world. Hillerman and his two Navajo detectives make wonderful tour guides therein. (Hillerman's books are published in hardcover by Harper & Row, and are available in Avon paperback editions as well.)

MYSTERY REVIEWS

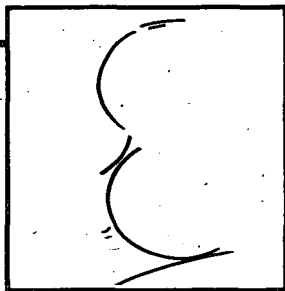
Some time ago, James McClure was the subject of a profile in this column. His latest book, **The Artful Egg**, brings back the South African police team of Lieutenant Tromp Kramer and his Zulu sidekick, Mickey Zondi. This time the two are investigating an apparently accidental household fatality: the wife of a retired police official has slipped in the bathtub and drowned. The teenage son's accusation of murder, though, complicates the case. And this is the *easy* case of the two that Tromp and Zondi have on their agenda. The other—the murder of a banned novelist—promises to be much more confusing. As always, the police team works well together, eventually solving both mysteries; along the way we see a fascinating picture of contemporary life in South Africa. (Pantheon Books, \$13.95, 283 pp.)

Sweet, Savage Death by Oriana Papazoglou is a very funny book about romance-fiction writers, their editors and agents, their fans—in short, the entire culture of genre romance publishing. The Third Annual Conference of the American Writers of Romance is the setting for murder and the story would probably have been entertaining even without Patience McKenna (the book's snappy narrator) and her creator's wickedly satirical slant on things. Imagine, then, what fun you have when both these elements *are* present. Here's an original, breath-of-fresh-air murder mystery that is delightfully youthful, and undeniably American. (Penguin, \$3.50, 188 pp.)

The Night the Gods Smiled by Eric Wright (A Signet Mystery, \$2.75, 254 pp.) introduces Inspector Charlie Salter, and a warm welcome is in order for this Canadian detective. In the book, the murder of a Toronto college professor at a convention in Montreal prompts Montreal to request local help in Toronto. The apparently routine chore is assigned to Salter, who soon sees possibilities here, and who begins doing the on-the-spot interviewing of the deceased's wife and colleagues. The personality of the dead man begins to come through clearly, and repeated references to his astounding good luck make Salter think he was killed because of something that happened to him in Montreal. The question is what, and Salter enthusiastically adopts the dead man's routines—even to the extent of taking up squash, as the dead man had, and seeing one of his young female students several times (up to the point of infatuation with her, just as her late teacher had done). May there be many more Charlie Salter mysteries to come.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



Gangster movies have come a long way since the 1930's, when they consisted of monstrous criminal acts followed by pursuit and unavoidable punishment. By the time *The Godfather* was made in 1972, the Mafia had become an idealized community, marked by intense bonds of family, by loyalties larger than life, and by business skills and ambitions that added up to a perfected version of the American dream. Now **Prizzi's Honor** has come along to put *The Godfather* in its place. Criminal "honor" turns out to mean greed, and the stately formalities of Mafia relations are exposed as nothing more than the frightened bowings and scrapings of one killer in the presence of another.

Charley Partanna is a highly placed Mafia hit man; his father

and uncles run rackets under the control of the local godfather, who is Charley's grandfather. Charley is loyal, but he lets love get in the way of recovering three quarters of a million dollars that has been stolen from the family. The lovely blonde he falls for turns out to be what one of the other characters calls "a thief and a hitter," that is, a hired killer. She is obviously descended from the alluring but fatal women of James M. Cain, but instead of packing a pearl handled revolver in her purse, she carries a professional's long barreled pistol with attachable silencer.

The lady seems to reciprocate Charley's love. She marries him, but lies to him and holds out on the money he was supposed to recover. Then she insists on helping him with a kidnapping. Charley complains: "I didn't get

married so my wife could go on woikin'." On the job, she kills an innocent bystander who happens to be a police captain's wife, and the whole local Mafia structure is put in jeopardy.

The script for *Prizzi's Honor* was intended to make its characters seem colorful and endearing. Like the Eskimos, who are said to use over thirty different words to describe snow, the killers in the movie have many cute synonyms for kill: clip, zotz, hit, dump. But legendary director John Huston (*Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, *The Maltese Falcon*) makes the viewer remember what these words really mean by the use of witty visual parody. Each character is held in silent close-

up just long enough to expose the meanness of his motives. The aged godfather of the Prizzi family repeatedly mouths the word "honor," but Huston has him whine in such a way that we see he's willing to sacrifice any principle in order to get his money back.

Jack Nicholson as Charley Partanna does not glorify his character but brings him down to earth where he belongs. Nicholson has just the right heaviness of manner and expression to convey both stolid dependability and the brutality requisite to commit murder. Charley does not pay for his killings in the end, for there is never any possibility that the corrupt police department will trouble him.

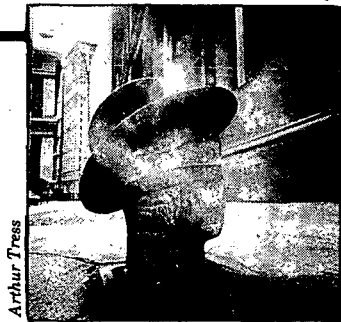
The police, who once invariably took the gangsters away at the end, have become insignificant in crime movies. Movie punishment these days has shifted to the murder of one criminal by another, a tricky business that cannot always result in a satisfactory outcome. In view of the contemporary difficulties in arranging punishment, *Prizzi's Honor* does quite well. It delivers good intrigue, fully realized characters, and, despite its script, a view of the underworld that manages to be amusing without glorifying crime.

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Jack Nicholson and Kathleen Turner in *Prizzi's Honor*.

THE STORY THAT WON



Arthur Tress

The May Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Colorado Butler of Tsailie, Arizona. Honorable mentions go to Don Shaffer of San Mateo, California; Evelyn Martin of Fernandina Beach, Florida; Victor L. Warzinski of Colliers, West Virginia; Warren J. Wightman of Fairport, New York; Kate Newell of Irving, Texas; La Donna Lane Grigsby of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma; Bennett Perryman of Chickasha, Oklahoma; Kay Conde of Granger, Wyoming; and Ladora R. Todhunter of Catoosa, Oklahoma.

CITY LIFE by Colorado Butler

He felt himself being devoured, swallowed up by the city. Hundreds of towering skyscrapers made him feel small and insignificant. Thousands had trampled him, struggling to make it in the all-consuming rat race. That's what it was—a rat race. Now they were out to finish him off. If only he had some body to help him.

He could hear them, hustling and bustling down 51st Street, their footsteps echoing through the canyon of office towers. There was no place to hide. In the sidewalk beneath him was a manhole. If only he could lift the grate and escape into the dark underground, he would be safe. He could rest in peace. But he had no body to help him.

They were coming, faster and faster. There was no escape. He was all alone. He had no body! No body!

All at once every body was upon him, grabbing, clawing, mangling him. Then he heard a shrill whistle. A New York cop! Just when you needed one!

"What's going on here?" he demanded.

One of them shrugged innocently and gestured toward the others. "We're not hurting any body. We're just trying to get a head."

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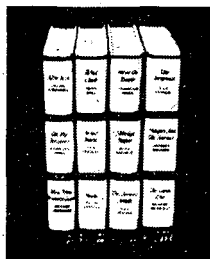
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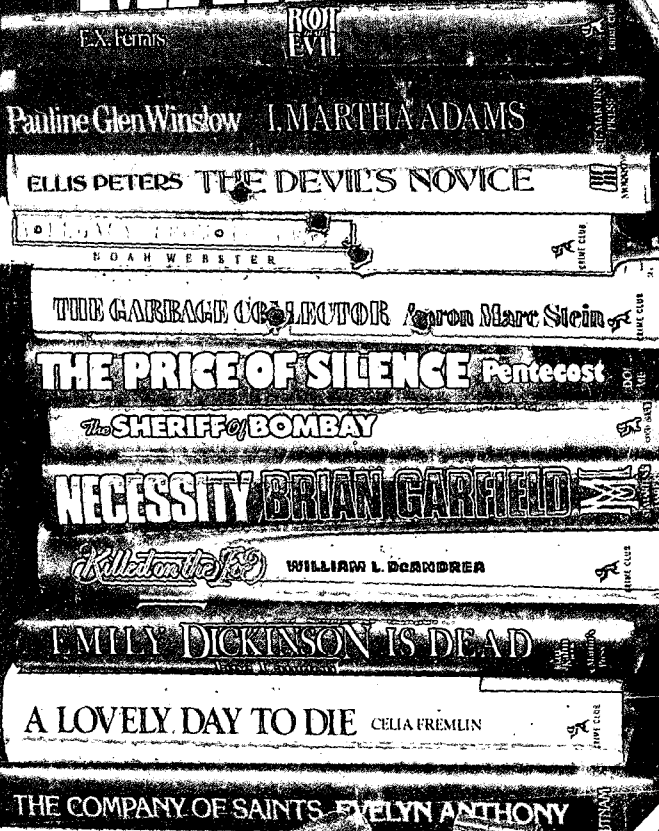
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